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## Flannery O'Connor

# A VIEW OF THE WOODS

The week before, Mary Fortune and the old man had spent every morning watching the machine that lifted out dirt and threw it in a pile. The construction was going on by the new lakeside on one of the lots that the old man had sold to somebody who was going to put up a fishing club. He and Mary Fortune drove down there every morning about ten o'clock and he parked his car, a battered mulberry-colored Cadillac, on the embankment that overlooked the spot where the work was going on. The red corrugated lake eased up to within fifty feet of the construction and was bordered on the other side by a black line of woods which appeared at both ends of the view to walk across the water and continue along the edge of the fields.

He sat on the bumper and Mary Fortune straddled the hood and they watched, sometimes for hours, while the machine systematically ate a square red hole in what had once been a cow pasture. It happened to be the only pasture that Pitts had succeeded in getting the bitterweed off and when the old man had sold it, Pitts had nearly had a stroke; and as far as Mr. Fortune was concerned, he could have gone on and had it.

"Any fool that would let a cow pasture interfere with progress is not on my books," he had said to Mary Fortune several times from his seat on the bumper, but the child did not have eyes for anything but the machine. She sat on the hood, looking down into the red pit, watching the big disembodied gullet gorge itself on the clay, then, with the sound of a deep sustained nausea and a slow mechanical revulsion, turn and spit it up. Her pale eyes behind her spectacles followed the repeated motion of it again and again and her face—a small replica of the old man's—never lost its look of complete absorption.

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No one was particularly glad that Mary Fortune looked like her grandfather except the old man himself. He thought it added greatly to her attractiveness. He thought she was the smartest and the prettiest child he had ever seen and he let the rest of them know that if, IF that was, he left anything to anybody, it would be Mary Fortune he left it to. She was now nine, short and broad like himself, with his very light blue eyes, his wide prominent forehead, his steady penetrating scowl and his rich florid complexion; but she was like him on the inside too. She had, to a singular degree, his intelligence, his strong will, and his push and drive. Though there was seventy years' difference in their ages, the spiritual distance between them was slight. She was the only member of the family he had any respect for.

He didn't have any use for her mother, his third or fourth daughter (he could never remember which), though she considered that she took care of him. She considered—being careful not to say it, only to look it—that she was the one putting up with him in his old age and that she was the one he should leave the place to. She had married an idiot named Pitts and had had seven children, all likewise idiots except the youngest, Mary Fortune, who was a throwback to him. Pitts was the kind who couldn't keep his hands on a nickel and Mr. Fortune had allowed them, ten years ago, to move onto his place and farm it. What Pitts made went to Pitts but the land belonged to Fortune and he was careful to keep the fact before them. When the well had gone dry, he had not allowed Pitts to have a deep well drilled but had insisted that they pipe their water from the spring. He did not intend to pay for a drilled well himself and he knew that if he let Pitts pay for it, whenever he had occasion to say to Pitts, "It's my land you're sitting on," Pitts would be able to say to him, "Well, it's my pump that's pumping the water you're drinking."

Being there ten years, the Pittses had got to feel as if they owned the place. The daughter had been born and raised on it but the old man considered that when she married Pitts she showed that she preferred Pitts to home; and when she came back, she came back like any other tenant, though he would not allow them to pay rent for the same reason he would not allow them to drill a well. Anyone over sixty years of age is in an uneasy position unless he controls

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the greater interest and every now and then he gave the Pittses a practical lesson by selling off a lot. Nothing infuriated Pitts more than to see him sell off a piece of the property to an outsider, because Pitts wanted to buy it himself.

Pitts was a thin, long-jawed, irascible, sullen, sulking individual and his wife was the duty-proud kind: It's my duty to stay here and take care of Papa. Who would do it if I didn't? I do it knowing full well I'll get no reward for it. I do it because it's my duty.

The old man was not taken in by this for a minute. He knew they were waiting impatiently for the day when they could put him in a hole eight feet deep and cover him up with dirt. Then, even if he did not leave the place to them, they figured they would be able to buy it. Secretly he had made his will and left everything in trust to Mary Fortune, naming his lawyer and not Pitts as executor. When he died Mary Fortune could make the rest of them jump; and he didn't doubt for a minute that she would be able to do it.

Ten years ago they had announced that they were going to name the new baby Mark Fortune Pitts, after him, if it were a boy, and he had not delayed in telling them that if they coupled his name with the name Pitts he would put them off the place. When the baby came, a girl, and he had seen that even at the age of one day she bore his unmistakable likeness, he had relented and suggested himself that they name her Mary Fortune, after his beloved mother, who had died seventy years ago, bringing him into the world.

The Fortune place was in the country on a clay road that left the paved road fifteen miles away and he would never have been able to sell off any lots if it had not been for progress, which had always been his ally. He was not one of these old people who fight improvement, who object to everything new and cringe at every change. He wanted to see a paved highway in front of his house with plenty of new-model cars on it, he wanted to see a supermarket store across the road from him, he wanted to see a gas station, a motel, a drive-in picture-show within easy distance. Progress had suddenly set all this in motion. The electric power company had built a dam on the river and flooded great areas of the surrounding country and the lake that resulted touched his land along a half-mile stretch. Every Tom, Dick and Harry, every dog and his brother, wanted a lot on the lake. There was talk of their getting a telephone

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line. There was talk of paving the road that ran in front of the Fortune place. There was talk of an eventual town. He thought this should be called Fortune, Georgia. He was a man of advanced vision, even if he was seventy-nine years old.

The machine that drew up the dirt had stopped the day before and today they were watching the hole being smoothed out by two huge yellow bulldozers. His property had amounted to eight hundred acres before he began selling lots. He had sold five twenty-acre lots on the back of the place and every time he sold one, Pitts's blood pressure had gone up twenty points. "The Pittses are the kind that would let a cow pasture interfere with the future," he said to Mary Fortune, "but not you and me." The fact that Mary Fortune was a Pitts too was something he ignored, in a gentlemanly fashion, as if it were an affliction the child was not responsible for. He liked to think of her as being thoroughly of his clay. He sat on the bumper and she sat on the hood with her bare feet on his shoulders. One of the bulldozers had moved under them to shave the side of the embankment they were parked on. If he had moved his feet a few inches farther out, the old man could have dangled them over the edge.

"If you don't watch him," Mary Fortune shouted above the noise of the machine, "he'll cut off some of your dirt!"

"Yonder's the stob," the old man yelled. "He hasn't gone beyond the stob."

"Not YET he hasn't," she roared.

The bulldozer passed beneath them and went on to the far side. "Well you watch," he said. "Keep your eyes open and if he knocks that stob, I'll stop him. The Pittses are the kind that would let a cow pasture or a mule lot or a row of beans interfere with progress," he continued. "The people like you and me with heads on their shoulders know you can't stop the marcher time for a cow. . . ."

"He's shaking the stob on the other side!" she screamed and before he could stop her, she had jumped down from the hood and was running along the edge of the embankment, her little yellow dress billowing out behind.

"Don't run so near the edge," he yelled but she had already reached the stob and was squatting down by it to see how much it had been shaken. She leaned over the embankment and shook her

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fist at the man on the bulldozer. He waved at her and went on about his business. More sense in her little finger than all the rest of that tribe in their heads put together, the old man said to himself, and watched with pride as she started back to him.

She had a head of thick, very fine, sand-colored hair—the exact kind he had had when he had had any—that grew straight and was cut just above her eyes and down the sides of her cheeks to the tips of her ears so that it formed a kind of door opening onto the central part of her face. Her glasses were silver-rimmed like his and she even walked the way he did, stomach forward, with a careful abrupt gait, something between a rock and a shuffle. She was walking so close to the edge of the embankment that the outside of her right foot was flush with it.

"I said don't walk so close to the edge," he called; "you fall off there and you won't live to see the day this place gets built up." He was always very careful to see that she avoided dangers. He would not allow her to sit in snakey places or put her hands on bushes that might hide hornets.

She didn't move an inch. She had a habit of his of not hearing what she didn't want to hear and since this was a little trick he had taught her himself, he had to admire the way she practiced it. He foresaw that in her own old age it would serve her well. She reached the car and climbed back onto the hood without a word and put her feet back on his shoulders where she had had them before, as if he were no more than a part of the automobile. Her attention returned to the far bulldozer.

"Remember what you won't get if you don't mind," her grandfather remarked.

He was a strict disciplinarian but he had never whipped her. There were some children, like the first six Pittses, whom he thought should be whipped once a week on principle, but there were other ways to control intelligent children and he had never laid a rough hand on Mary Fortune. Furthermore, he had never allowed her mother or her brothers and sisters so much as to slap her. The elder Pitts was a different matter.

He was a man of a nasty temper and of ugly unreasonable resentments. Time and again, Mr. Fortune's heart had pounded to see him rise slowly from his place at the table—not the head, Mr. For-

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tune sat there, but from his place at the side—and abruptly, for no reason, with no explanation, jerk his head at Mary Fortune and say, "Come with me," and leave the room, unfastening his belt as he went. A look that was completely foreign to the child's face would appear on it. The old man could not define the look but it infuriated him. It was a look that was part terror and part respect and part something else, something very like cooperation. This look would appear on her face and she would get up and follow Pitts out. They would get in his truck and drive down the road out of earshot, where he would beat her.

Mr. Fortune knew for a fact that he beat her because he had followed them in his car and had seen it happen. He had watched from behind a boulder about a hundred feet away while the child clung to a pine tree and Pitts, as methodically as if he were whacking a bush with a sling blade, beat her around the ankles with his belt. All she had done was jump up and down as if she were standing on a hot stove and make a whimpering noise like a dog that was being peppered. Pitts had kept at it for about three minutes and then he had turned, without a word, and got back in his truck and left her there, and she had slid down under the tree and taken both feet in her hands and rocked back and forth. The old man had crept forward to catch her. Her face was contorted into a puzzle of small red lumps and her nose and eyes were running. He sprang on her and sputtered, "Why didn't you hit him back? Where's your spirit? Do you think I'd a let him beat me!"

She had jumped up and started backing away from him with her jaw stuck out. "Nobody beat me," she said.

"Didn't I see it with my own eyes?" he exploded.

"Nobody is here and nobody beat me," she said. "Nobody's ever beat me in my life and if anybody did, I'd kill him. You can see for yourself nobody is here."

"Do you call me a liar or a blindman!" he shouted. "I saw him with my own two eyes and you never did a thing but let him do it, you never did a thing but hang onto that tree and dance up and down a little and blubber and if it had been me, I'd a swung my fist in his face and . . ."

"Nobody was here and nobody beat me and if anybody did I'd kill him!" she yelled and then turned and dashed off through the woods.

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"And I'm a Poland china pig and black is white!" he had roared after her and he had sat down on a small rock under the tree, disgusted and furious. This was Pitts's revenge on him. It was as if it were *he* that Pitts was driving down the road to beat and it was as if *he* were the one submitting to it. He had thought at first that he could stop him by saying that if he beat her, he would put them off the place but when he had tried that, Pitts had said, "Put me off and you put her off too. Go right ahead. She's mine to whip and I'll whip her every day of the year if it suits me."

Any time he could make Pitts feel his hand he was determined to do it and at present he had a little scheme up his sleeve that was going to be a considerable blow to Pitts. He was thinking of it with relish when he told Mary Fortune to remember what she wouldn't get if she didn't mind, and he added, without waiting for an answer, that he might be selling another lot soon and that if he did, he might give her a bonus but not if she gave him any sass. He had frequent little verbal tilts with her but this was a sport like putting a mirror up in front of a rooster and watching him fight his reflection.

"I don't want no bonus," Mary Fortune said.

"I ain't ever seen you refuse one."

"You ain't ever seen me ask for one neither," she said.

"How much have you laid by?" he asked.

"Noner yer bidnis," she said and stamped his shoulders with her feet. "Don't be buttin into my bidnis."

"I bet you got it sewed up in your mattress," he said, "just like an old nigger woman. You ought to put it in the bank. I'm going to start you an account just as soon as I complete this deal. Won't anybody be able to check on it but me and you."

The bulldozer moved under them again and drowned out the rest of what he wanted to say. He waited and when the noise had passed, he could hold it in no longer. "I'm going to sell the lot right in front of the house for a gas station," he said. "Then we won't have to go down the road to get the car filled up, just step out the front door."

The Fortune house was set back about two hundred feet from the road and it was this two hundred feet that he intended to sell. It was the part that his daughter airily called "the lawn" though it was nothing but a field of weeds.

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"You mean," Mary Fortune said after a minute, "the lawn?"

"Yes mam!" he said. "I mean the lawn," and he slapped his knee.

She did not say anything and he turned and looked up at her. There in the little rectangular opening of hair was his face looking back at him, but it was a reflection not of his present expression but of the darker one that indicated his displeasure. "That's where we play," she muttered.

"Well there's plenty of other places you can play," he said, irked by this lack of enthusiasm.

"We won't be able to see the woods across the road," she said.

The old man stared at her. "The woods across the road?" he repeated.

"We won't be able to see the view," she said.

"The view?" he repeated.

"The woods," she said; "we won't be able to see the woods from the porch."

"The woods from the porch?" he repeated.

Then she said, "My daddy grazes his calves on that lot."

The old man's wrath was delayed an instant by shock. Then it exploded in a roar. He jumped up and turned and slammed his fist on the hood of the car. "He can graze them somewheres else!"

"You fall off that embankment and you'll wish you hadn't," she said.

He moved from in front of the car around to the side, keeping his eye on her all the time. "Do you think I care where he grazes his calves! Do you think I'll let a calf interfere with my bidnis? Do you think I give a damn hoot where that fool grazes his calves?"

She sat, her red face darker than her hair, exactly reflecting his expression now. "He who calls his brother a fool is subject to hell fire," she said.

"Jedge not," he shouted, "lest ye be not jedged!" The tinge of his face was a shade more purple than hers. "You!" he said. "You let him beat you any time he wants to and don't do a thing but blubber a little and jump up and down!"

"He nor nobody else has ever touched me," she said, measuring off each word in a deadly flat tone. "Nobody's ever put a hand on me and if anybody did, I'd kill him."

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"And black is white," the old man piped, "and night is day!"

The bulldozer passed below them. With their faces about a foot apart, each held the same expression until the noise had receded. Then the old man said, "Walk home by yourself. I refuse to ride a Jezebel!"

"And I refuse to ride with the Whore of Babylon," she said and slid off the other side of the car and started off through the pasture.

"A whore is a woman!" he roared. "That's how much you know!" But she did not deign to turn around and answer him back, and as he watched the small robust figure stalk across the yellow-dotted field toward the woods, his pride in her, as if it couldn't help itself, returned like the gentle little tide on the new lake—all except that part of it that had to do with her refusal to stand up to Pitts; that pulled back like an undertow. If he could have taught her to stand up to Pitts the way she stood up to him, she would have been a perfect child, as fearless and sturdy-minded as anyone could want; but it was her one failure of character. It was the one point on which she did not resemble him. He turned and looked away over the lake to the woods across it and told himself that in five years, instead of woods, there would be houses and stores and parking places, and that the credit for it could go largely to him.

He meant to teach the child spirit by example and since he had definitely made up his mind, he announced that noon at the dinner table that he was negotiating with a man named Tilman to sell the lot in front of the house for a gas station.

His daughter, sitting with her worn-out air at the foot of the table, let out a moan as if a dull knife were being turned slowly in her chest. "You mean the lawn!" she moaned and fell back in her chair and repeated in an almost inaudible voice, "He means the lawn."

The other six Pitts children began to bawl and pipe, "Where we play!" "Don't let him do that, Pa!" "We won't be able to see the road!" and similar idiocies. Mary Fortune did not say anything. She had a mulish reserved look as if she were planning some business of her own. Pitts had stopped eating and was staring in front of him. His plate was full but his fists sat motionless like two dark quartz

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stones on either side of it. His eyes began to move from child to child around the table as if he were hunting for one particular one of them. Finally they stopped on Mary Fortune sitting next to her grandfather. "You done this to us," he muttered.

"I didn't," she said but there was no assurance in her voice. It was only a quaver, the voice of a frightened child.

Pitts got up and said, "Come with me," and turned and walked out, loosening his belt as he went, and to the old man's complete despair, she slid away from the table and followed him, almost ran after him, out the door and into the truck behind him, and they drove off.

This cowardice affected Mr. Fortune as if it were his own. It made him physically sick. "He beats an innocent child," he said to his daughter, who was apparently still prostrate at the end of the table, "and not one of you lifts a hand to stop him."

"You ain't lifted yours neither," one of the boys said in an undertone and there was a general mutter from that chorus of frogs.

"I'm an old man with a heart condition," he said. "I can't stop an ox."

"She put you up to it," his daughter murmured in a languid listless tone, her head rolling back and forth on the rim of her chair. "She puts you up to everything."

"No child never put me up to nothing!" he yelled. "You're no kind of a mother! You're a disgrace! That child is an angel! A saint!" he shouted in a voice so high that it broke and he had to scurry out of the room.

The rest of the afternoon he had to lie on his bed. His heart, whenever he knew the child had been beaten, felt as if it were slightly too large for the space that was supposed to hold it. But now he was more determined than ever to see the filling station go up in front of the house, and if it gave Pitts a stroke, so much the better. If it gave him a stroke and paralyzed him, he would be served right and he would never be able to beat her again.

Mary Fortune was never angry with him for long, or seriously, and though he did not see her the rest of that day, when he woke up the next morning, she was sitting astride his chest ordering him to make haste so that they would not miss the concrete mixer.

The workmen were laying the foundation for the fishing club

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when they arrived and the concrete mixer was already in operation. It was about the size and color of a circus elephant; they stood and watched it churn for a half-hour or so. At eleven-thirty, the old man had an appointment with Tilman to discuss his transaction and they had to leave. He did not tell Mary Fortune where they were going but only that he had to see a man.

Tilman operated a combination country store, filling station, scrap-metal dump, used-car lot and dance hall five miles down the highway that connected with the dirt road that passed in front of the Fortune place. Since the dirt road would soon be paved, he wanted a good location on it for another such enterprise. He was an up-and-coming man—the kind, Mr. Fortune thought, who was never just in line with progress but always a little ahead of it so that he could be there to meet it when it arrived. Signs up and down the highway announced that Tilman's was only five miles away, only four, only three, only two, only one; then "Watch out for Tilman's, Around this bend!" and finally, "Here it is, Friends, TILMAN'S!" in dazzling red letters.

Tilman's was bordered on either side by a field of old used-car bodies, a kind of ward for incurable automobiles. He also sold outdoor ornaments, such as stone cranes and chickens, urns, jardiniers, whirligigs, and farther back from the road, so as not to depress his dance-hall customers, a line of tombstones and monuments. Most of his businesses went on out-of-doors, so that his store building itself had not involved excessive expense. It was a one-room wooden structure onto which he had added, behind, a long tin hall equipped for dancing. This was divided into two sections, Colored and White, each with its private nickelodeon. He had a barbecue pit and sold barbecued sandwiches and soft drinks.

As they drove up under the shed of Tilman's place, the old man glanced at the child sitting with her feet drawn up on the seat and her chin resting on her knees. He didn't know if she would remember that it was Tilman he was going to sell the lot to or not.

"What you going in here for?" she asked suddenly, with a sniffing look as if she scented an enemy.

"Noner yer bidnis," he said. "You just sit in the car and when I come out, I'll bring you something."

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"Don'tcher bring me nothing," she said darkly, "because I won't be here."

"Haw!" he said. "Now you're here, it's nothing for you to do but wait," and he got out and without paying her any further attention, he entered the dark store where Tilman was waiting for him.

When he came out in half an hour, she was not in the car. Hiding, he decided. He started walking around the store to see if she was in the back. He looked in the doors of the two sections of the dance hall and walked on around by the tombstones. Then his eye roved over the field of sinking automobiles and he realized that she could be in or behind any one of two hundred of them. He came back out in front of the store. A Negro boy, drinking a purple drink, was sitting on the ground with his back against the sweating ice cooler.

"Where did that little girl go to, boy?" he asked.

"I ain't seen nair little girl," the boy said.

The old man irritably fished in his pocket and handed him a nickel and said, "A pretty little girl in a yeller cotton dress."

"If you speakin about a stout chile look lak you," the boy said, "she gone off in a truck with a white man."

"What kind of a truck, what kind of a white man!" he yelled.

"It were a green pick-up truck," the boy said smacking his lips, "and a white man she call 'daddy.' They gone thataway some time ago."

The old man, trembling, got in his car and started home. His feelings raced back and forth between fury and mortification. She had never left him before and certainly never for Pitts. Pitts had ordered her to get in the truck and she was afraid not to. But when he reached this conclusion he was more furious than ever. What was the matter with her that she couldn't stand up to Pitts? Why was there this one flaw in her character when he had trained her so well in everything else? It was an ugly mystery.

When he reached the house and climbed the front steps, there she was sitting in the swing, looking glum-faced in front of her across the field he was going to sell. Her eyes were puffy and pink-rimmed but he didn't see any red marks on her legs. He sat down in the swing beside her. He meant to make his voice severe but instead it

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came out crushed, as if it belonged to a suitor trying to reinstate himself.

"What did you leave me for? You ain't ever left me before," he said.

"Because I wanted to," she said, looking straight ahead.

"You never wanted to," he said. "He made you."

"I toljer I was going and I went," she said in a slow emphatic voice, not looking at him, "and now you can go on and lemme alone." There was something very final, in the sound of this, a tone that had not come up before in their disputes. She stared across the lot where there was nothing but a profusion of pink and yellow and purple weeds, and on across the red road, to the sullen line of black pine woods fringed on top with green. Behind that line was a narrow gray-blue line of more distant woods and beyond that nothing but the sky, entirely blank except for one or two threadbare clouds. She looked into this scene as if it were a person that she preferred to him.

"It's my lot, ain't it?" he asked. "Why are you so up-in-the-air about me selling my own lot?"

"Because it's the lawn," she said. Her nose and eyes began to run horribly but she held her face rigid and licked the water off as soon as it was in reach of her tongue. "We won't be able to see across the road," she said.

The old man looked across the road to assure himself again that there was nothing over there to see. "I never have seen you act in such a way before," he said in an incredulous voice. "There's not a thing over there but the woods."

"We won't be able to see 'um," she said, "and that's the *lawn* and my daddy grazes his calves on it."

At that the old man stood up. "You act more like a Pitts than a Fortune," he said. He had never made such an ugly remark to her before and he was sorry the instant he had said it. It hurt him more than it did her. He turned and went in the house and upstairs to his room.

Several times during the afternoon, he got up from his bed and looked out the window across the "lawn" to the line of woods she said they wouldn't be able to see any more. Every time he saw

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the same thing: woods—not a mountain, not a waterfall, not any kind of planted bush or flower, just woods. The sunlight was woven through them at that particular time of the afternoon so that every thin pine trunk stood out in all its nakedness. A pine trunk is a pine trunk, he said to himself, and anybody that wants to see one don't have to go far in this neighborhood. Every time he got up and looked out, he was reconvinced of his wisdom in selling the lot. The dissatisfaction it caused Pitts would be permanent, but he could make it up to Mary Fortune by buying her something. With grown people, a road led either to heaven or hell, but with children there were always stops along the way where their attention could be turned with a trifle.

The third time he got up to look at the woods, it was almost six o'clock and the gaunt trunks appeared to be raised in a pool of red light that gushed from the almost hidden sun setting behind them. The old man stared for some time, as if for a prolonged instant he were caught up out of the rattle of everything that led to the future and were held there in the midst of an uncomfortable mystery that he had not apprehended before. He saw it, in his hallucination, as if someone were wounded behind the woods and the trees were bathed in blood. After a few minutes this unpleasant vision was broken by the presence of Pitts's pick-up truck grinding to a halt below the window. He returned to his bed and shut his eyes and against the closed lids hellish red trunks rose up in a black wood.

At the supper table nobody addressed a word to him, including Mary Fortune. He ate quickly and returned again to his room and spent the evening pointing out to himself the advantages for the future of having an establishment like Tilman's so near. They would not have to go any distance for gas. Anytime they needed a loaf of bread, all they would have to do would be step out their front door into Tilman's back door. They could sell milk to Tilman. Tilman was a likable fellow. Tillman would draw other business. The road would soon be paved. Travelers from all over the country would stop at Tilman's. If his daughter thought she was better than Tilman, it would be well to take her down a little. All men were created free and equal. When this phrase sounded in his head, his patriotic sense triumphed and he realized that it was his duty to sell the lot, that

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he must insure the future. He looked out the window at the moon shining over the woods across the road and listened for a while to the hum of crickets and treefrogs, and beneath their racket, he could hear the throb of the future town of Fortune.

He went to bed certain that just as usual, he would wake up in the morning looking into a little red mirror framed in a door of fine hair. She would have forgotten all about the sale and after breakfast they would drive into town and get the legal papers from the courthouse. On the way back he would stop at Tilman's and close the deal.

When he opened his eyes in the morning, he opened them on the empty ceiling. He pulled himself up and looked around the room but she was not there. He hung over the edge of the bed and looked beneath it but she was not there either. He got up and dressed and went outside. She was sitting in the swing on the front porch, exactly the way she had been yesterday, looking across the lawn into the woods. The old man was very much irritated. Every morning since she had been able to climb, he had waked up to find her either on his bed or underneath it. It was apparent that this morning she preferred the sight of the woods. He decided to ignore her behavior for the present and then bring it up later when she was over her pique. He sat down in the swing beside her but she continued to look at the woods. "I thought you and me'd go into town and have us a look at the boats in the new boat store," he said.

She didn't turn her head but she asked suspiciously, in a loud voice, "What else are you going for?"

"Nothing else," he said.

After a pause she said, "If that's all, I'll go," but she did not bother to look at him.

"Well put on your shoes," he said. "I ain't going to the city with a barefoot woman." She did not bother to laugh at this joke.

The weather was as indifferent as her disposition. The sky did not look as if it were going to rain or as if it were not going to rain. It was an unpleasant gray and the sun had not troubled to come out. All the way into town, she sat looking at her feet, which stuck out in front of her, encased in heavy brown school shoes. The old man had often sneaked up on her and found her alone in conversation with her feet and he thought she was speaking with them silently now. Every now and then her lips moved but she said nothing

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to him and let all his remarks pass as if she had not heard them. He decided it was going to cost him considerable to buy her good humor again and that he had better do it with a boat, since he wanted one too. She had been talking boats ever since the water backed up onto his place. They went first to the boat store. "Show us the yachts for po' folks!" he shouted jovially to the clerk as they entered.

"They're all for po' folks!" the clerk said. "You'll be po' when you finish buying one!" He was a stout youth in a yellow shirt and blue pants and he had a ready wit. They exchanged several clever remarks in rapid-fire succession. Mr. Fortune looked at Mary Fortune to see if her face had brightened. She stood staring absently over the side of an outboard motor boat at the opposite wall.

"Ain't the lady innerested in boats?" the clerk asked.

She turned and wandered back out onto the sidewalk and got in the car again. The old man looked after her with amazement. He could not believe that a child of her intelligence could be acting this way over the mere sale of a field. "I think she must be coming down with something," he said. "We'll come back again," and he returned to the car.

"Let's go get us an ice-cream cone," he suggested, looking at her with concern.

"I don't want no ice-cream cone," she said.

His actual destination was the courthouse but he did not want to make this apparent. "How'd you like to visit the ten-cent store while I tend to a little bidnis of mine?" he asked. "You can buy yourself something with a quarter I brought along."

"I ain't got nothing to do in no ten-cent store," she said. "I don't want no quarter of yours."

If a boat was of no interest, he should not have thought a quarter would be and reproved himself for that stupidity. "Well what's the matter, sister?" he asked kindly. "Don't you feel good?"

She turned and looked him straight in the face and said with a slow concentrated ferocity, "It's the lawn. My daddy grazes his calves there. We won't be able to see the woods any more."

The old man had held his fury in as long as he could. "He beats you!" he shouted. "And you worry about where he's going to graze his calves!"

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"Nobody's ever beat me in my life," she said, "and if anybody did, I'd kill him."

A man seventy-nine years of age cannot let himself be run over by a child of nine. His face set in a look that was just as determined as hers. "Are you a Fortune," he said, "or are you a Pitts? Make up your mind."

Her voice was loud and positive and belligerent. "I'm Mary—Fortune—Pitts," she said.

"Well I," he shouted, "am PURE Fortune!"

There was nothing she could say to this and she showed it. For an instant she looked completely defeated, and the old man saw with a disturbing clearness that this was the Pitts look. What he saw was the Pitts look, pure and simple, and he felt personally stained by it, as if it had been found on his own face. He turned in disgust and backed the car out and drove straight to the courthouse.

The courthouse was a red and white blaze-faced building set in the center of a square from which most of the grass had been worn off. He parked in front of it and said, "Stay here," in an imperious tone and got out and slammed the car door.

It took him a half-hour to get the deed and have the sale paper drawn up and when he returned to the car, she was sitting on the back seat in the corner. The expression on that part of her face that he could see was foreboding and withdrawn. The sky had darkened also and there was a hot sluggish tide in the air, the kind felt when a tornado is possible.

"We better get on before we get caught in a storm," he said and added emphatically, "because I got one more place to stop at on the way home," but he might have been chauffeuring a small dead body for all the answer he got.

On the way to Tilman's he reviewed once more the many just reasons that were leading him to his present action and he could not locate a flaw in any of them. He decided that while this attitude of hers would not be permanent, he was permanently disappointed in her and that when she came around she would have to apologize; and that there would be no boat. He was coming to realize slowly that his trouble with her had always been that he had not shown

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enough firmness. He had been too generous. He was so occupied with these thoughts that he did not notice the signs that said how many miles to Tilman's until the last one exploded joyfully in his face: "Here it is, Friends, TILMAN'S!" He pulled in under the shed.

He got out without so much as looking at Mary Fortune and entered the dark store where Tilman, leaning on the counter in front of a triple shelf of canned goods, was waiting for him.

Tilman was a man of quick action and few words. He sat habitually with his arms folded on the counter and his insignificant head weaving snake-fashion above them. He had a triangular-shaped face with the point at the bottom and the top of his skull was covered with a cap of freckles. His eyes were green and very narrow and his tongue was always exposed in his partly opened mouth. He had his checkbook handy and they got down to business at once. It did not take him long to look at the deed and sign the bill of sale. Then Mr. Fortune signed it and they grasped hands over the counter.

Mr. Fortune's sense of relief as he grasped Tilman's hand was extreme. What was done, he felt, was done and there could be no more argument, with her or with himself. He felt that he had acted on principle and that the future was assured.

Just as their hands loosened, an instant's change came over Tilman's face and he disappeared completely under the counter as if he had been snatched by the feet from below. A bottle crashed against the line of tinned goods behind where he had been. The old man whirled around. Mary Fortune was in the door, red-faced and wild-looking, with another bottle lifted to hurl. As he ducked, it broke behind him on the counter and she grabbed another from the crate. He sprang at her but she tore to the other side of the store, screaming something unintelligible and throwing everything within her reach. The old man pounced again and this time he caught her by the tail of her dress and pulled her backward out of the store. Then he got a better grip and lifted her, wheezing and whimpering but suddenly limp in his arms, the few feet to the car. He managed to get the door open and dump her inside. Then he ran around to the other side and got in himself and drove away as fast as he could.

His heart felt as if it were the size of the car and was racing forward, carrying him to some inevitable destination faster than he

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had ever been carried before. For the first five minutes he did not think but only sped forward as if he were being driven inside his own fury. Gradually the power of thought returned to him. Mary Fortune, rolled into a ball in the corner of the seat, was snuffling and heaving.

He had never seen a child behave in such a way in his life. Neither his own children nor anyone else's had ever displayed such temper in his presence, and he had never for an instant imagined that the child he had trained himself, the child who had been his constant companion for nine years, would embarrass him like this. The child he had never lifted a hand to!

Then he saw, with the sudden vision that sometimes comes with delayed recognition, that that had been his mistake.

She respected Pitts because, even with no just cause, he beat her; and if he—with his just cause—did not beat her now, he would have nobody to blame but himself if she turned out a hellion. He saw that the time had come, that he could no longer avoid whipping her, and as he turned off the highway onto the dirt road leading to home, he told himself that when he finished with her, she would never throw another bottle again.

He raced along the clay road until he came to the line where his own property began and then he turned off onto a side path, just wide enough for the automobile and bounced for a half a mile through the woods. He stopped the car at the exact spot where he had seen Pitts take his belt to her. It was a place where the road widened so that two cars could pass or one could turn around, an ugly red bald spot surrounded by long thin pines that appeared to be gathered there to witness anything that would take place in such a clearing. A few stones protruded from the clay.

"Get out," he said and reached across her and opened the door.

She got out without looking at him or asking what they were going to do and he got out on his side and came around the front of the car.

"Now I'm going to whip you!" he said and his voice was extra loud and hollow and had a vibrating quality that appeared to be taken up and passed through the tops of the pines. He did not want to get caught in a downpour while he was whipping her and he

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said, "Hurry up and get ready against that tree," and began to take off his belt.

What he had in mind to do appeared to come to her very slowly as if it had to penetrate a fog in her head. She did not move but gradually her confused expression began to clear. Where a few seconds before her face had been red and distorted and unorganized, it drained now of every vague line until nothing was left on it but positiveness, a look that went slowly past determination and reached certainty. "Nobody has ever beat me," she said, "and if anybody tries it, I'll kill him."

"I don't want no sass," he said and started toward her. His knees felt very unsteady, as if they might turn either backward or forward.

She moved exactly one step back and, keeping her eye on him steadily, removed her glasses and dropped them behind a small rock near the tree he had told her to get ready against. "Take off your glasses," she said.

"Don't give me orders!" he said in a high voice and slapped awkwardly at her ankles with his belt.

She was on him so quickly that he could not have recalled which blow he felt first, whether the weight of her whole solid body or the jabs of her feet or the pummeling of her fist on his chest. He flailed the belt in the air, not knowing where to hit but trying to get her off him until he could decide where to get a grip on her.

"Leggo!" he shouted. "Leggo I tell you!" But she seemed to be everywhere, coming at him from all directions at once. It was as if he were being attacked not by one child but by a pack of small demons all with stout brown school shoes and small rocklike fists. His glasses flew to the side.

"I toljer to take them off," she growled without pausing.

He caught his knee and danced on one foot and a rain of blows fell on his stomach. He felt five claws in the flesh of his upper arm where she was hanging from while her feet mechanically battered his knees and her free fist pounded him again and again in the chest. Then with horror he saw her face rise up in front of his, teeth exposed, and he roared like a bull as she bit the side of his jaw. He seemed to see his own face coming to bite him from several sides at once but he could not attend to it for he was being kicked in-

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discriminately, in the stomach and then in the crotch. Suddenly he threw himself on the ground and began to roll like a man on fire. She was on top of him at once, rolling with him and still kicking, and now with both fists free to batter his chest.

"I'm an old man!" he piped. "Leave me alone!" But she did not stop. She began a fresh assault on his jaw.

"Stop stop!" he wheezed. "I'm your grandfather!"

She paused, her face exactly on top of his. Pale identical eye looked into pale identical eye. "Have you had enough?" she asked.

The old man looked up into his own image. It was triumphant and hostile. "You been whipped," it said, "by me," and then it added, bearing down on each word, "and I'm PURE Pitts."

In the pause she loosened her grip and he got hold of her throat. With a sudden surge of strength, he managed to roll over and reverse their positions so that he was looking down into the face that was his own but had dared to call itself Pitts. With his hands still tight around her neck, he lifted her head and brought it down once hard against the rock that happened to be under it. Then he brought it down twice more. Then looking into the face in which the eyes, slowly rolling back, appeared to pay him not the slightest attention, he said, "There's not an ounce of Pitts in me."

He continued to stare at his conquered image until he perceived that though it was absolutely silent, there was no look of remorse on it. The eyes had rolled back down and were set in a fixed glare that did not take him in. "This ought to teach you a good lesson," he said in a voice that was edged with doubt.

He managed painfully to get up on his unsteady kicked legs and to take two steps, but the enlargement of his heart which had begun in the car was still going on. He turned his head and looked behind him for a long time at the little motionless figure with its head on the rock.

Then he fell on his back and looked up helplessly along the bare trunks into the tops of the pines and his heart expanded once more with a convulsive motion. It expanded so fast that the old man felt as if he were being pulled after it through the woods, felt as if he were running as fast as he could with the ugly pines toward the lake. He perceived that there would be a little opening there, a little place where he could escape and leave the woods behind him.

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He could see it in the distance already, a little opening where the white sky was reflected in the water. It grew as he ran toward it until suddenly the whole lake opened up before him, riding majestically in little corrugated folds toward his feet. He realized suddenly that he could not swim and that he had not bought the boat. On both sides of him he saw that the gaunt trees had thickened into mysterious dark files that were marching across the water and away into the distance. He looked around desperately for someone to help him but the place was deserted except for one huge yellow monster which sat to the side, as stationary as he was, gorging itself on clay.

**Juan Ramón Jiménez**

## THE LITTLE GREEN GIRL

The girl is green. She possesses
Eyes of green, hair of green.

Her woodland rosebud
Is not pink nor white but green.

She comes in the green air!
The earth turns green.

Her bright gauzy dress
Is neither white nor blue but green.

She comes in the green sea!
The sky turns green.

My life continually opens
A little door of green for her.

(*Translated from the Spanish by H. R. Hays*)

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Sidney Hook

# SOCIALISM AND LIBERATION

We have traveled a long way since 1950. At that time it seemed that despite the policy of containment pursued by the West, the Kremlin would seize the offensive in Western Europe and launch a war while the United States was pinned down in Asia countering the Communist North Korean, and later the Chinese, invasion of South Korea. Partly to prevent such a war, and partly in the hope that if such a war were forced on the West the people of the satellite world would rise against their oppressors, the slogan of "liberation" received gradual but equivocal support, equivocal because no government or leading statesman thought through what a policy of liberation—as distinct from a hope—really entailed.

The development of nuclear weapons by the Soviet Union made it apparent that liberation by means of war might very well mean liberation from existence. Although there is considerable evidence that the Soviet regime cannot be provoked into war, and, further, that whenever its leaders feel they can win by a sudden move that will at the same time forestall any devastating retaliation, they will discard their slogans of "peaceful coexistence"—nonetheless, the danger of war is sufficiently great, and the reaction to that danger so fearful, that it is the prime cause of the widespread moods of appeasement and neutralism periodically generated in recent years in Western Europe. Anyone frank enough to admit it knows that despite the evidence of Budapest and its aftermath, this mood is as strong as ever in Europe today.

No leading statesman of the West has ever preached or advocated a preventive war; and even the leaders of the Assembly of the Captive European Nations believe that a firm and consistent policy of liberation can be pursued by the free world *without* war. But

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if war is ruled out as an instrument of liberation, one cannot so easily rule out the possibility of liberation by revolution. Those who, like Mr. George Kennan, proclaimed that "There is a finality, for better or for worse, about what has now occurred in Eastern Europe"—and proclaimed this *before* Poznan, *before* the Polish October and the Hungarian November—were much too hasty in their judgment of finality. And unfortunately such a judgment itself had an enormous influence on the response to these events.

I am among those who believe that at the time of the Hungarian revolution a firm and direct intervention by the United Nations and the West in response to the appeal of the Nagy government would probably have led to the withdrawal of Soviet troops. The Kremlin will not be slow, we can be sure, to learn the lesson of Hungary. It is now clear that it will use force sufficient to suppress any popular revolt against a Soviet puppet regime, and that mere declarations of disapproval by the West will not keep the Russian tanks from moving in. A revolution under such circumstances can achieve heroism, martyrdom, but not victory. In the modern technological age, a practically unarmed nation cannot, without help from outside allies, stand against the massed might of tanks and other armor.

The only realistic perspective in the next historical period—short of a revolution or civil war within the Soviet Union itself—is, it seems to me, liberation by evolution. I mean by this the gradual transformation, within the ideological tradition of Marxism-Leninism, of the totalitarian system of Communism in satellite countries into a libertarian culture in which the strategic political and cultural freedoms of an open society are legally recognized and *in fact* realized.

I make no prediction that such a transformation will actually occur or when it will occur. That depends upon many factors outside the scope of this discussion. I assume only that such a transformation is desirable. I shall raise the question of whether such a transformation is possible; and, if possible, how, and especially which elements in the traditional Marxist ideology as well as in the current Communist theory and practice lend themselves to this development.

Of course, the ideology of Marxism and Leninism cannot so simply be assimilated to the ideal of human freedom. Yet anyone

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acquainted with the history of ideas knows that the same generic terms and doctrines have encompassed the widest variations in personality, belief and practice. Communism as a secular religion has often been compared with Christianity, and identified by Toynbee—mistakenly, I believe—with one of its sects. But how vast and full of incompatible elements is the spectrum of beliefs called "Christian." The development of Christianity is largely the history of radical changes, both in doctrine and in practice, by those who claimed to be doing no more than returning to the pure essence of the doctrine.

The evolution of Christian doctrine and organizational practice is a very complex theme. We owe the very fact that Christianity is—unlike its ancestral form, Judaism—a universal religion, to the first great revisionist, Paul. But for Paul, Christianity might have remained a Jewish sect with the complacent approval of Christ's immediate disciples. Paul's was the first organizational revolution in the history of Christianity and there have been many others. Even more impressive are the major *intellectual* readjustments Christianity made when confronted with different systems of belief; at the outset it almost invariably suspected and opposed such systems as heretical. But they were all assimilated, in time—some easily, others with difficulty. No matter how often the motto *semper idem* is proclaimed, the irreversible phenomena of social, scientific, and technological change enforce corresponding changes in organization, doctrine, dogma, and above all *behavior*. Those who say only the extrinsic trappings of faith change, overlook the fact that the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic is a shifting one and that the way in which dogmas are *expressed* and *lived* determines their meaning.

What is true of religious movements is also true of other fields of human experience. Even in so recondite an aspect of intellectual history as pure philosophy, whose terms and meanings are presumed to be controlled by the immanent logic of texts, we find William of Ockham, the father of modern nominalism, claiming that he is doing nothing more than returning to the orthodoxy of Aristotle. Yet hardly anything has more powerfully undermined European Aristotelianism and contributed to the rise of modern science than has Ockham's criticism in the name of Aristotle of the doctrine of substantial forms.

Whether we consider the actual content of the slogan "the re-

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turn to Christ" or "the return to Kant," the "return to Rome or Jerusalem"—we will find that these returns always mark an original departure in doctrine and movement, sometimes in opposition to the actual intentions of the innovators.

What is for present purposes more to the point, is that even Lenin's slogan "Back to Marx," which he borrowed from Rosa Luxemburg, marked a tremendous revision in what until then had been understood by Marxism. Lenin's extremely voluntaristic *What's to be Done?*, although too simply characterized by some critics as spawned under Bakuninistic and Blanquist influence, was certainly not the Marxism of Kautsky and Plekhanov. What Lenin did to Marx in the name of Marxism, Stalin in lesser measure did to Lenin in the name of Leninism. This raises the question of the extent to which it will be possible in the current atmosphere of ambiguous devaluation of Stalin to initiate in satellite countries even more far-reaching departures in Communist theory and practice by "returning" to Marx. I am not here assuming that what may be possible in the satellite countries can be mechanically extrapolated to developments within the Soviet Union. This is a different even if related question.

However we explain it, the historical spectacle of the European past shows us Christian fighting Christian in the name of "true" Christianity. It is perhaps hardly an exaggeration to say that had the West not come to the support of the chameleon Tito when he was threatened by Stalin, we might have seen Communist fighting Communist in the name of the principles of "true Communism." Our problem is: can we disintegrate or transform Communist parties in satellite countries by heretical reinterpretations of the meaning of Marx? It is the Communist *parties* we must influence, for the people are not Communist. Communist regimes lack even the popular support the Kremlin can command by posing as the defender of Russian nationalism, for nationalism in all the satellite countries is hostile to Communism.

Communist theory and practice hang together more closely than in other ideologies, but it is possible to exaggerate their monolithic unity. Although adherence to a set of doctrines or better, a set of formulas, is, and always has been, *de rigueur* for all Communist parties affiliated with the Kremlin, some variations were permitted in the road to power—especially if they proved successful and were

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not taken in defiance of the Kremlin's orders. Stalin explicitly condemned the American theory of exceptionalism, which simply asserted the banal proposition that each Communist party must take note of the distinctive peculiarities of its own political history and geography—primarily to replace one Communist faction by a more compliant one. Yet when the opportunity presented itself after the war, he heartily approved of the manner in which the Czech, Yugoslav and Chinese Communists seized power, even though in one case it involved making the peasantry, not the proletariat, the basis of the Communist movement (China), and in no case did it involve the use of Soviets in whose name the Communist Party seized power as it did in the Russian October Revolution.

When we turn from the consideration of "different roads to power" to "different roads to socialism" we find the variations in the practices of Communist states just as great, but enormously more significant.[1] Even if we consider all these different roads to socialism as different ways of enslaving the human spirit—as at the present time they are—they may also be assessed as providing varying opportunities if not for immediate liberation at least for some extension of the areas of freedom.

Different roads to *power* are comparable to different roads leading to a city. The city is the same irrespective of the way we reach it. But different roads to socialism, about which the classics of Marxism really say little, may be compared to different ways of building a city. The different ways of building a city result in substantially different cities because the means used are not like the scaffolding torn away when the building is constructed but are like the bricks and mortar, the steel and glass which become intrinsic elements of the finished construction. The architectural metaphor pervades the entire literature of Marxism and Communism and for most purposes is defective and misleading since it cannot express the facts of historical process and reciprocity. But it serves admirably to drive home the logic of the means-end relation. If it is true that not pious words but means determine ends, then the adoption of different means of constructing socialism involves the very real likelihood of different *kinds* of socialism, unwelcome as this may be to the leaders of the Communist movement. In his remarkable speech to the Eighth

1. See the illuminating survey by Peter Wiles, "Polycentric Communism," in *Soviet Survey,* May 1957.

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Plenum of the Central Committee of the Polish Communist Party in October, 1956, Gomulka spoke of the construction of the best model of socialism and of improving the design of the model by using better spare parts. The metaphor is different but the point is the same. By the method of replacing spare parts with better ones, modern technology can make a standard Ford coupe go faster than a Cadillac.

Today, under the name of Communism and Marxism, we find considerable differences in the theory and practice of "socialistic society" in four different regions—the Soviet Union, China, Yugoslavia, and Poland. Some of these differences reflect, so to speak, the historical and geographical landscape and the accidents attendant upon origin. The differences in theory may turn out to be even more momentous because to the extent that theory is a guide to action—and it is often only a rationalization of action—differences in doctrine can lead to the intensification of differences in social, economic and cultural behavior. Thus, when Mao-tse Tung says that socialism is a garden in which many different theories can be permitted to grow, he has said something of which Krushchev cannot approve without the danger of letting the "thaw" get out of hand. Even though, as seems likely, Mao-tse Tung will destroy as a poisonous weed any doctrine he does not like, his words may meanwhile inspire programs of liberalization in other countries—programs hesitant and tentative, to be sure, but still possible bases for further development. Even more significant, when Gomulka proclaims that "the best definition of the social contents inherent in the idea of socialism is contained in the definition that socialism is a social system which abolishes the exploitation and oppression of man by man," and that, "what is immutable in socialism can be reduced to the abolition of the exploitation of man by man," these pronouncements constitute a more radical revision of traditional Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism than do Titoism and Maoism. Its sweep is as radical as Ockham's intellectual transformation of Aristotle. For it follows at once from this conception of socialism that it is absent in the Soviet Union and the alleged people's democracies—since it is not difficult to show that their populations, as they very well know, are exploited and oppressed economically, culturally, and politically. It follows that even a Jeffersonian community of small landowners who till their own soil and one of individual craftsmen who own their instruments of

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production, do not employ others and hence cannot exploit their labor, would have to be called socialistic!

The very conception of "different roads to socialism" gives rise naturally to the notion of "national Communism" so much feared by the Kremlin and therefore even by Tito and Gomulka. For "national Communism" is just as much a departure from the classic views of international communism as "national socialism" is from the socialism of the Communist Manifesto. And in a genuine sense the first expression of national Communism is to be found not in Titoism but in Stalinism, under which the concluding line of the Communist Manifesto was in practice made to read: "Workers of the World Unite—to Defend the Soviet Union."

I am well aware of the fact that our century can be characterized as the era of "the degradation of the word" and that the use of the term "democracy," for example, among Fascists and Communists designates the precise opposite of the commonly accepted meaning of the term. In a sense this is true of almost every key term in the Communist handbook of agitation and propaganda. Nevertheless, the actual doctrines which are believed by those who make the important decisions in the Communist world cannot be reduced to a phenomenon of this character. Even those who lie must believe that they know some truths in order to lie effectively. We must remember that fanatical sincerity of belief is not incompatible with cynicism and opportunism in the means used to impose the belief on others.

The question I wish to raise is whether, in terms of the official ideology and in the light of incontestable realities, the totalitarian integument of Communist doctrine can be shattered by uncovering, developing and re-interpreting the rich legacy of ambiguities in the intellectual and social movement of Marxism. The existence of these ambiguities is obvious from the fact that both the Social Democrats and the Communists invoke the Marxist traditions which are actually far more ambiguous than even the Social Democrats imagine. The existence of these ambiguities is revealed in the accounts given by former ideological functionaries of Communist parties, such as Wolfgang Leonard, of the process by which their difficulties developed into cancerous doubts, and Stalin was gradually rejected in the name of Lenin, and Lenin finally rejected in the name of Marx. I am *not* raising the question of whether any profound institutional

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changes can take place by way of doctrine *alone,* for this seems to me very improbable. Economic and international political factors are usually more weighty. I am asking only whether *in the struggle* for freedom, any aspect of the Marxist tradition can be refashioned and sharpened into a serviceable weapon.. Today in Poland there is an intense discussion of the basic meaning of Marxism, which may have such effects.

Let us look at some key Marxist concepts in this light.

There are two conceptions of property in Marx and the Marxist tradition, one of which provides the basis not only for the critique of capitalism but even more powerfully for a critique of what passes for socialist economy in all the satellite countries as well as the Soviet Union.

The first conception of property is substantial and legalistic. It defines property in terms of legal relations where the law is construed as a decree certifying *title* of ownership. The development of modern economy in the West has limited the usefulness of this concept by separating title from actual economic power. The second conception of property in Marx is functional and sociological. It is bound up with the Marxist ethical critique of capitalism. According to this conception, property is a form of power—the power not so much to use or abuse instruments, goods and services (since this is always limited) as the power *to exclude* others from using them. That is why property *in* things may be power *over* the lives of human beings if they need access to these things to continue life. Wherever property in land and instruments of production gives power to exclude individuals from the land and from access to instruments of production, they give a very real power over the personal lives of these individuals.

Without reference to the institutional, social and political framework of a community, one cannot tell whether the substantial legal *title* to the property of anything is any more than a *promise,* not so much even of income—for income may all be taxed away—as only of non-transferability. That is why the British Labour Party believes it can move toward socialism *within* the framework of existing legal relations, without expropriation. Conversely, even *after* expropriation, where legal title to property has been abolished, the continued *de facto* power to deny access to others to goods and services,

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and especially access to the means of livelihood, in effect gives those who wield this power most of the traditional rights of ownership under classical capitalism. This cuts right to the heart of the fiction that collectivized or nationalized industry, since it is no *one* man's individual property, *eo ipso* automatically spells the end of exploitation. Under any system of socialization, where the institutional framework makes it possible for workers to be systematically denied access to the means of production, to the means of their livelihood, to speak of the workers' ownership of the productive plant, to say it belongs to them is a mockery.

Nor is it any different when we hear it said that the property in question is *state* property. For this merely pushes the question further back. To whom does the state belong or who controls the state? If a group is excluded from effective political participation, what sense does it make to say that the state belongs to that group? In the Nazi political economy, for example, those who had legal *title* to the instruments of production, once stripped of powers of control in their own industries, after being deprived of political power, were reduced to the status of operatives of the German state, which really meant the ruling hierarchy of the Nazi Party. At most they received a return on their investment, but the size, frequency, and above all, the reinvestment of that return depended on the Nazi high command. They could not close down their factories if they were unprofitable: they could not hire or fire at will. In effect these industries belonged to the Nazi Party. They were *party* property.

The same situation obtains in the Soviet Union and in most of the satellite countries—only more so. The juridical change in proprietorship transferred title from capitalists and landlords to the collectivity. But the collectivity is a legal fiction whose actual content, according to sound Marxist principles, depends upon how it is actually organized, how it functions, and the different roles played by different groups in the actual processes of production. Since almost from the very beginning, the Communist Commissars had absolute power to deny access to farm or factory to any peasant or worker, to decide what should be saved, spent and how, and to determine the conditions and rewards of work, and everything else connected with the use of the industrial plant, natural resources, etc., and since this power was in no way responsible to those whom its decisions so fatefully affected, in effect—and again according to legitimate Marxist

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categories—the instruments of production belonged to the Communist Party hierarchy, giving it all the traditional privileges of ownership except the right to buy and sell and the right of testamentary disposition. Under such a setup, workers can be and have been exploited more intensively, i.e., more surplus value sweated out of them, than under other forms of legal ownership since the early days of the Industrial Revolution.

Despite the semantic outrage of referring to the Soviet Union or any other Communist economy as a "workers' state" and to the productive plant as "state property," the facts were really not in dispute. When Lenin brutally proclaimed to the Eleventh Congress of the Russian Communist Party, in 1922, "We are the state," he might as well have said: "We are the owners of the economy." Insofar as Marxism is a critique of the economies of exploitation, it can be used more legitimately and with greater devastation in present-day Communist countries than in most of the present-day democratic capitalistic countries of the West.

In general, modern economic developments have made the contrast between capitalism and socialism, as economic systems, very difficult to draw in practice. To the extent to which it is an issue, the question reduces itself to *more* or *less,* not to either/or. The ever-increasing intervention of the welfare states of the West in economic affairs, the planning in many sectors of the economy, progressive taxation which reaches beyond 90 per cent at certain levels in the U.S., the alienation of ownership from management in large industry described in the epoch-making study of Berle and Means, the growth and power of free trade unionism, the establishment of minimum wages and multiple forms of social insurance, the movement toward co-determination in industry and a guaranteed annual wage—all these indicate the degree to which the picture of classical capitalism as drawn by Marx has been altered. On the other hand, in the so-called socialist economies we find large deviations from classic socialist ideas—enormous differences in income, reliance upon strategic centers for private enterprise not only in agriculture but in industry, too (China), the influence of the international markets and sometimes the domestic market on prices, and a tendency toward economic decentralization.

It is obvious when we look at the economies which are called socialist in countries like the U.S.S.R., China, Yugoslavia, Czecho-

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slovakia and Poland that there are considerable differences in *practice*. I wish to suggest that when we examine Marxist *theory* we can detect even greater potential differences in meaning—a complex of ambiguities which manifest, or can be given, either a democratic or totalitarian variant. Because Marxism is primarily a critique of capitalism, it provides no specific directives but only general guides as to how to build socialism. These guides are more social, political and moral than economic in nature, because Marx assumed that the processes of accumulation would have progressed to a point where there would be no problem of having to construct capital goods industries. The ambiguities in Marxism are aggravated by the bolshevik success in refuting (or revising) Marx in their attempt to lay the foundation of socialist economy *by political* means in industrially backward areas—something presumably ruled out by historical materialism. The most fervent "Marxists" today are those who have actually refuted Marx while excoriating the revisionists of Marx.

There is no historical necessity in the way in which socialism is to be built, otherwise we could not speak of different paths to socialism. No matter what the objective economic conditions, other factors enter into the situation. Among them an important—I do not say decisive—factor may be the way in which traditional Marxist principles are interpreted and developed. The direction in which "socialist" economy and society will develop may depend, for example, in some countries upon how the principle of "workers' control," stressed in pre-revolutionary terms by both syndicalists and Marxists alike, is understood. Let us look more closely at this concept.

There has always been an ambiguity about the nature and function of "workers' control" in socialist theory. The Utopian theory of Marxism, according to which some day the state will disappear, made the organs of workers' control on the level of the factory, the administrative unit of society which would function without coercion by the voluntary cooperation of an historically new species of man. For purposes of revolutionary struggle, "workers' control" was stressed as a means of heightening the pitch of a revolutionary situation, breaking the resistance of the class enemy, and getting production going again. All tendencies within the socialist movement declared themselves *for* workers' control but few seemed clear about what it meant and those who were clear were not always in agree-

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ment with one another. Some held that workers' control was a kind of industrial democracy which would *supplement* political democracy, others that it would *replace* political democracy. Some thought it meant only a consultation *with* the workers by management, others that it meant participation by the workers with powers of co-decision *in* management. These differences polarized around the generic views that workers' control was something exercised *for* the workers by a political group monopolizing power or, on the other hand, that it was something exercised *by* the workers themselves, following whatever leadership they chose.

In the early days of bolshevism, on the eve of taking power and shortly thereafter, the Communists stressed in the most emphatic way the desirability of workers' control in every factory. In the beginning there was hardly any difference between the Communist and anarcho-syndicalist views of how a socialist society would function. In countries in which anarcho-syndicalist traditions were strong, Communists actually seized the factories and tried to run them even before they destroyed the existing political power. Before long, however, the control of the Communist Party asserted itself so forcibly that the phrase "workers' control" became a transparent piece of terminological hypocrisy. Lenin himself led the fight against "the workers' opposition," a group in the Communist Party which took the earlier agitational and propaganda slogans seriously, as an anarcho-syndicalist deviation.

The Yugoslav Communists who speak today of "workers' control" imply that Stalin revised Lenin's position on this question while *they* are following the Leninist pattern. This is a misleading oversimplification. It results from confusing decentralization of industry and planning, which permits greater autonomy to the individual plant, and which the Yugoslavs *have* carried out, with independent workers' control in the decentralized plants, a control which the Yugoslavs only *promise*. And if they follow Lenin, they will never deliver on their promises. For even in the most liberal period of Russian economic life, Lenin insisted that in the interests of rapid construction of large-scale industry "it is absolutely essential that all authority in the factories should be in the hands of the management."

We need not stop to point out that management in the so-called capitalist countries has much less power over workers than manage-

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ment in socialist societies, while trade unions in the former in actual practice enjoy far more control than workers' councils in theory. Lenin recognized the limited role of the trade unions in correcting "the excesses and blunders resulting from the bureaucratic distortions of the state apparatus," and this stand was of tremendous importance in that it provided a justification of the right of the workers to strike in the so-called "workers' state"—to strike in all state enterprises. That this right was hedged in by all sorts of restrictions and qualifications, that it was more honored in the breach than in the observance, does not detract from its significance and its use as a rallying cry in the present and future. It was this truncated right which was lost under Stalin and in all Stalinist regimes. It was a grievous loss, for the abolition of the right to strike means in effect the existence of a system of forced labor with all its multiform kinds of exploitation and aggression.

In Yugoslavia today a very limited kind of workers' control through workers' councils operates in conjunction with a largely decentralized industry planned to meet the market needs of local regions. This system came into existence more because of economic necessity than because of political virtue. And however limited the control, Soviet critical reaction has not been less severe. What is interesting is the theoretical justification of these institutional deviations from the Soviet pattern expressed by Kardelj and other Yugoslav Communists in grandiose ideological terms.

Kardelj, in his speech of December 7, 1956, before the Yugoslav People's Assembly, frankly accepts the theory of exceptionalism, but he claims Yugoslavia to be exceptional in being most faithful to the conceptions of Marx and Lenin. The development of socialist industry, he asserts, must take place concomitantly with a progressive democratization of all social relations. "Human beings should not in a socialist system become the slaves of a state machine in the name of any higher interests whatsoever." To achieve independence from the state machine, the social and economic position of the worker must be secured by strengthening the democratic control of the workers in the factories and in their communities. Only in this way can the state wither away in Marxist fashion instead of becoming an all-devouring Frankenstein monster.

Kardelj makes some interesting distinctions, for example be-

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tween "socialized property"—what is produced in a factory whose workers decide what is to be produced—and "state property" which is administered by organs of government beyond the influence of workers. There is a further distinction between "socialized property" and the workers' own "individual property." There is a dialectical relationship, according to Kardelj, "a unity of opposition," between the socialized property of the worker and his own individual property which if disrupted either transforms the worker into a slave of a state capitalist system or leads to the abolition of social ownership of the instruments of production.

For Kardelj, the key issue is to avoid the bureaucratization of socialism. This is inevitable, according to him, unless there is "active, direct and increasing participation of the producers in the direction of state and industry." Those who like the Russian Soviet apologists interpret this as undermining the dictatorship of the proletariat are indifferent, he says, to the fact that "the dictatorship which they characterize as 'proletarian' can be anything else in the world except proletarian, precisely because it is not filled with a democratic content."

Here again, I am not concerned with the motivation of this theoretical departure from Stalinism, the extent to which it is actually embodied in Yugoslavian practice, and the political uses to which it is put. Tito, for example, although professing to blame the Hungarian Stalinists for refusing to follow the lead of the Hungarian workers, inconsistently supports the Russian suppression of their councils. Similarly Krushchev, after blowing off about the Yugoslav deviation during his visit to Czechoslovakia, sings softly after his meeting with Tito in Roumania. Considerations of *Staatsräson* obviously determine the official reactions. But ideas, although not independent, once launched upon the world may develop a life and an influence of their own. It is the *direction* of the Yugoslav heresy which is important—not only its nationalism, its claim that all Communist states are equal in dignity in a common cause, but its emphasis upon a conception of workers' democracy which might turn out, once material conditions are favorable to it, to be an ideological hydrogen bomb.

It is not necessary to claim that this conception of decentralized workers' control is economically viable or that the democratic ele-

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ments it embodies cannot be introduced in other ways. Obviously, a system which aims at a maximum of efficiency cannot permit any really great independence to the economic decisions of the workers' councils. But maximum efficiency need *not* be the highest desideratum of a socialist society or any society. Further, bureaucracy without any semblance of workers' control or participation may be inefficient too—perhaps more inefficient than a relatively anarchic, non-bureaucratic system. Human beings normally appraise an economy by other than strictly economic norms.

The most significant thing about the ideological position of the Yugoslav regime is that, if it is taken seriously, it spells the end of the political monopoly of the Communist Party. In actual fact, there is less workers' control in Yugoslavia than in Poland, where even Gomulka views the workers' councils suspiciously. One of the reasons is that the Communist Party in Yugoslavia is more monolithic, less democratic, and closer to the Stalinist model than the Polish party. Workers' control, to the modest extent that it actually exists in Yugoslavia, was not a spontaneous demand made by the workers themselves, as in Poland and most conspicuously in Hungary, but was carried through under the tutelage and control of the Yugoslav Communist Party.

A "workers' control" which is in turn controlled by a party faction with the secret police behind it collapses of itself—it dies of boredom and disinterest, like the Russian soviets and local trade unions. Some semblance of power, no matter how fearfully guarded by the party watchdogs, must be given to the workers. This power in time either grows from what it feeds upon or becomes atrophied. It is the natural form through which, where it exists, opposition can be "legitimately" channeled.

That Kardelj, for all his lack of clarity, his inconsistencies and backtracking, is on the right road, from the point of view of intensifying the struggle between the democratic and totalitarian potentials of socialism, is evidenced in part by the character of the embittered reply made to him by A. Rumjanzew in the Moscow *Kommunist*. Rumjanzew recognizes that in effect Kardelj is charging that the Soviet Union is a new form of class state in which, although the legal title of ownership has been transferred to the workers and peasants, the latter are in fact being exploited by the

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state apparatus, its functionaries and pensioners, and that consequently the class struggle is still being waged in the alleged socialist society, not between non-existent capitalists and landlords, on the one hand, and the toiling masses, on the other hand, but between the latter and the new class of Communist officials, managers and their retainers. Rumjanzew attempts to toss this off with a laugh as a *reductio ad absurdum* too ridiculous to require refutation—and then attempts one anyhow. If the workers by definition own the instruments of production, he asks, how can they be said to exploit themselves? He is oblivious to the possibility that there may be something wrong with his definition, and that to resort to it in the face of the glaring facts of political and economic inequality is merely to fall back on a question-begging definition.

Gomulka's discussion of the function of the workers' councils is something else. He sees their development as one of the three main elements in the Polish road to socialism. In his speech before the Ninth Plenum of the Party Central Committee, Gomulka outlines seven chief tasks of the workers' councils which if taken literally would make them masters of the factories and, therefore, of all of industry. He warns against conceiving the councils "as organs of political power" but at the same time is fearful lest the political leadership of the Communist Party fractions be displaced. He wants workers' councils to be autonomous and at the same time seeks, in vain it seems to me, to limit their functions to purely industrial issues. Because of the nature of the Polish economy, he is undoubtedly sensible in cautioning the workers' councils against a too near-sighted and too decentralized view of the needs of production. But if they are actually given the right to make mistakes in these matters, they are being given very real powers indeed. And he is quite forthright in acknowledging the right of the workers to strike, although he does not regard this as the best way of rectifying grievances.

Gomulka has ambiguous feelings about increasing the power of the workers' councils as well as that of the people's councils because of his fear that they may work free of the influence of the Communist Party, whose leading position he regards as essential to the building of socialism. As if aware that all the elements which define the Polish road to socialism, if given their head, may carry Poland out of the Kremlin's orbit, as if to reassure the uneasy Russians, he

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delivers even stronger attacks against those he calls revisionists, and who really are democratic socialists of Western vintage, than against the Stalinist dogmatists and conservatives. Gomulka taxes the revisionists with believing that socialism can be built without any class struggle. The accuracy of this characterization I regard as very questionable. The difficulty is to know what kind of class struggle can be waged after the capitalists and great landholders disappear. Struggles still go on, but if they are class struggles they are of the kind that Kardelj describes—between the toilers, the workers and peasants, and the state and party officialdom. More accurate is Gomulka's charge against the revisionists that they are opposed to the dictatorship of the Communist Party. This *is* true. But it is also true of Marx.

As everyone knows, "the dictatorship of the proletariat" as interpreted by Lenin and Stalin is substantially the dictatorship of the Communist Party *over* the proletariat and all other social groups. That this represented a radical departure from the meaning Marx gave to the rarely used phrase in his writings can scarcely be doubted. Marx and Engels pointed to the Paris Commune as illustrating what they meant by "the dictatorship of the proletariat." The Commune was one in which several different political groups or parties participated, and in which the followers of Marx were a tiny minority. In the *Communist Manifesto,* Marx had said that Communists "do not constitute themselves a special party over and above other working-class parties."

The "dictatorship of the proletariat" in the corpus of Marx's writings is not in the first instance a political concept but a social one. The opposite of the phrase is the "dictatorship of the bourgeoisie." Since, according to Marxist theory, a "dictatorship of the bourgeoisie" is compatible with many political forms ranging from monarchy, Bonapartism and other expressions of dictatorship through an entire spectrum of parliamentary democracies, it is clear that the economic and social content of the dictatorship of the proletariat, in theory at least, is compatible with the existence of one or more political parties and with political structures ranging from dictatorship to democracy.

Socialism declares itself opposed to *all* forms of exploitation and oppression, to any kind of class society in which coercion, open or

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veiled, is present. Marxism recognizes, however, that every dictatorship, even when it is considered progressive with respect to expanding the forces of production, is a form of oppression. If one takes Marx literally, the elimination of all coercion from human relations, the complete withering away of the state, is a Utopian ideal—but pragmatically it can be interpreted as an ideal of diminishing coercion and exploitation of human society.

If one reads Marx in the light of modern sociology, one understands that classes will continue to exist, class struggles will continue to be fought, even though the role of classes will differ when different social relationships are introduced. A strike under socialism is a struggle even though some terminological purist may balk at calling it an expression of class struggle. In either case, or on either interpretation, there is an imminent dynamic toward greater democracy in the Marxist ideal, toward a permanent revolution against whatever series of evils the social process generates. This tendency is accentuated by the heritage of Utopian and anarchistic socialism which Marxism accepted despite its scorn of it.

Marxism is a philosophically primitive system but it never identified the social system of the future with the end or process of history itself in the way in which Hegel identified the Absolute Idea or the Way of God with the Prussian state. Because Communism is a disease of idealism, if only it does not harden into the fanaticism which makes a fetish of the instrument—the instrument of the Communist Party—it may prove to be susceptible to the virus of political liberalism.

Historically, in the Soviet Union the Bolsheviks took power with the Left Social Revolutionists as a cover. They permitted other socialist parties to exist for a time in a tortured way. On paper, but only on paper, bourgeois parties could exist. On occasion, in order to bring home the distinction between the dictatorship as a social and economic instrument and dictatorship as a political weapon, Lenin maintained that it is "quite conceivable that the dictatorship of the proletariat may suppress the bourgeoisie at every step without disenfranchising the bourgeoisie . . . while it is essential to suppress the bourgeoisies as an [economic] class, it is not essential to deprive them of their suffrage and equality."

What this meant with respect to bourgeois parties, and later all

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other parties, is that if they agreed not to oppose the program of the Communist Party in any way whatsoever after the latter seized power, they would be permitted to exist, although it is not clear what the point of their political existence would be. With respect to other working-class or socialist parties, Bolshevik fanaticism led to the same result. For the Bolsheviks believed that any serious disagreement with the Communist Party by *definition* had counter-revolutionary objective consequences, which led to the sardonic observation of one of their leaders in the '20s: "Of course the Bolsheviks believe in the existence of several working-class parties—one party in power, the others in jail."

The Communist regimes in the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and some of the satellites are unabashed one-party dictatorships. In China, Poland, Czechoslovakia and East Germany the Communist Party rules with the device of phony coalition parties. The existence of these parties is in part the price the Communists pay for their hypocritical pretenses to democracy, but under a favorable conjunction of circumstances, especially in the satellite countries, where aspirations to national independence are strong, conditions may compel them to pay a higher and higher price in granting political independence to these other parties. In some countries, as in Hungary today, such ostensibly non-Communist parties would be betraying their people by giving some protective national coloration to Russian puppets like Kadar. In Poland, where the situation is in flux, another tactic may be required.

In this connection, of course, Gomulka's regime is unique. Since he is trying to do the impossible, to keep the dictatorship of the Communist Party and to encourage the independence of the Peasant Party, Gomulka must fail. But he and those who support him can fail in two ways—fail in encouraging other political parties or fail in being good Bolsheviks. In the view of democracy, the latter failure is of course preferable. When Gomulka proclaims, "It is a poor idea to maintain that only Communists can build socialism, that only peoples holding materialistic social views can do so," he should certainly be applauded, and even more so when he characterizes socialism in ethical terms as "the system of social justice."

When with this conception of socialism he urges "competition between our Party and the Peasant Party as well as between all those

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in favor of strengthening the socialist system" he has taken a longer stride away from the Leninist and Stalinist conception of the political dictatorship of the minority Communist Party than he is aware of. When he also calls for the revitalization of the Sjem, its assumption of greater legislative tasks, and control over the work of the government and state organs, when he proclaims that "In my opinion Sjem control over the executive organs of state power should be exercised by an institution subordinated directly to the Sjem and not to the government as has been the case up to now," who can fail to hear with his inner ear, despite the uncertain words and reluctant tone, the voice of parliamentary democracy? That voice is muffled and fearful, to be sure, lest it be overheard by the Kremlin, interpreted as an abandonment both of socialism and the Warsaw Pact, and serve as a pretext for Soviet invasion.

All Gomulka need say explicitly to promise the restoration of political democracy as we understand it, is that in the legally recognized competition among political parties to achieve the best system of social justice, all proposals can be put forth, *even* proposals to abandon socialism. It would be unreasonable to expect him to go as far as this at once, especially if socialism is defined as "social justice"—since this makes everybody a socialist. In the end, a democratic society must go this far, but the task today is to win victory for the right to propose different roads to socialism *within* Poland. In such a situation the Communist Party, or any other, would have to win its leadership, and not claim it merely in virtue of the fact of dictatorship.

As if he were reading the minds of his listeners, Gomulka assures his fellow Communists that "we shall not allow anyone to use the processes of democratization to undermine socialism." Now, how does anyone go about "undermining" socialism if one really believes in, and employs, the processes of democratization? Actually, Gomulka's fear is not so much that democracy will undermine socialism as that it will undermine the Kremlin's patience. Capitalism is largely an anachronism, anyway, in countries that have existed for a decade under Communist rule. Even in a country like England, the Conservatives accepted a good deal of the socialized sector of industry because of the social costs involved in returning it to private hands.

Many of the moves away from total or extreme collectivization

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and the more conspicuous forms of party terrorism in Communist countries are motivated today by considerations of political strategy. They may be reversed overnight. Nonetheless they are all points of ideological and institutional infection in the Communist body politic. If these heretical germs get into the Marxist blood stream, they may produce fevers in the short time and languors in the long time resulting in profound organic changes in the system.

Recent events behind the Iron Curtain have shown that socialist humanism, despite its exaggerated claims to novelty, has a greater continuity with traditional forms of Western humanism than both its official spokesmen and its hostile Western critics imagined. The new Soviet men, the new Communist men with new criteria of the true, the good, and the beautiful, of whom Stalin boasted and whom the West feared, are a myth. Despite the principle of *"partinost"* or partisanship in dialectical materialism, Communist intellectuals, whether scientists or historians, know the difference between truth and lies, facts and fiction. They have not succumbed to the totalitarian psychoses described by Orwell in his *1984*; and if they rewrite the past at the behest of Big Brother or of a Committee of Big Brothers, they know what they are doing. If they confess to imaginary and impossible crimes, it is not because of the sacrificial mysticism attributed by Koestler to Rubashov but because of the beatings, the broken ribs and other violent methods admitted by Khrushchev at the Twentieth Congress to be the standard techniques of examination.

Things can never be the same again after the fumbling attempt of Stalin's accomplices to de-Stalinize, after the Polish declaration of independence, after the heroic spectacle of the Hungarian nation in arms against the Russian occupation. Even without war and foreign intervention, even without violent revolution, the intellectual elite of all Communist countries will produce in each generation, and in every social group or class, critical spirits nurtured on the ideals of freedom expressed in the classics of Marxism as well as in those of the humanist tradition, well aware of the discrepancies between Soviet promise and performance, and of the Communists' betrayal of almost all the liberating ideals which inspired the socialist movement. Their presence, whether articulate or eloquently silent, will constitute a permanent opposition to cultural and political tyr-

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anny. What is required above all else is to make these critical spirits, whether or not any one of them is a potential Djilas, Kolokowski, or Ignotus, aware of the fact that their predicaments, their problems, their struggles and their sufferings are known beyond the borders of their own countries.

The pace of democratic change in Communist countries cannot be predicted, but we know that since the false internationalism of the Soviet Union has been shown to be only an expression of Russian imperialism, every critic, every dissident, will conceive his struggle for greater liberalization in social and political life as a struggle for national liberation. In a free Europe, nationalism may be transcended but only when the legitimate claims of patriotism expressed as piety for the sources of one's being and tradition, have been recognized. The Kremlin cannot seriously extend the right to genuine national self-determination to its satellites without starting a chain reaction whose consequences will take these countries still further out of the orbit of Communism.

Given the history of the twentieth century, once a "thaw" sets in in any aspect of culture in a totalitarian society, it has a tendency to extend not only into neighboring cultural fields but to take political form as well. The chagrin and rage of the Soviet Communist leaders at the Hungarian and Polish intellectuals is due to their realization that the heretical cultural ideas of these men will prove in the long run *politically* infectious. The logic of the situation is such that every concession made to artists, writers, or scientists carries with it consequences that call for further concessions, which when denied put into question the sincerity and genuineness of the first concession. History often shows that changes are more rapid when things begin to get a bit better. Despair paralyzes the will to action, especially risky action; hope inspires it. We can be sure that the slight taste of the freedoms which the peoples of the satellite countries have been given, after being deprived of them for almost a decade, will generate an enormous appetite for more—and perhaps this hunger will spread to the Soviet Union itself.

(*Sidney Hook's article continues the series on "The Crisis in Communism" begun in our pages in 1956. Other pieces on the subject will appear in* PR *in the near future.*—The Editors.)

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Alfred Kazin

# THE STILLNESS OF "LIGHT IN AUGUST"

*Light in August* begins unforgettably with a pregnant young woman from Alabama sitting beside a road in Mississippi, her feet in a ditch, her shoes in her hand, watching a wagon that is mounting the hill toward her with a noise that carries for a half-mile "across the hot still pinewiney silence of the August afternoon." She has been on the road for a month, riding in a long succession of farm wagons or walking the hot dusty roads with her shoes in her hand, trying to get to Jefferson. There, she firmly expects, she will find her lover working in a planing mill and ready to marry her, and there—that is the big city—she will put her shoes on at last.

This opening chapter, so dry and loving in its pastoral humor, centering on the picture of Lena and her precious burden being carried in one wagon or another, by one farmer after another, to her hoped-for destination in a husband, ends sharply on the outskirts of Jefferson, from which she can see smoke going up from a burning house. It is the house of Joanna Burden, who has just been murdered by Joe Christmas. And the images that have been crowding us with the dust and the heat of the unending road—with Lena continually amazed at how far a body can go, the serenity of the deserted young woman whose face is "calm as a stone, but not hard," the "sharp and brittle crack and clatter" of the "wagon's weathered and ungreased wood and metal," the identical and anonymous wagons, the mules plodding in a steady and unflagging hypnosis, the drowsy heat of the afternoon; with Lena's faded blue dress, her palm leaf fan, her small cloth bundle in which she carries thirty-five cents in nickels and dimes; with the shoes that she takes off and carries in her hand as soon as she feels the dust of the road beneath her feet—all provide us with that foundation in the local and the provincial, the

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earth and the road which man must travel on it, against which are set images of fire and murder, of aimless wandering and of flight, embodied in the figure who soon enters the book and dominates it in his remorseless gray anonymity. Joe Christmas does not even have a name of his own, only a mocking label stuck on him at the orphanage where he was deposited one Christmas eve. "Joe Christmas" is worse than any real name could be, for it indicates not only that he has no background, no roots, no name of his own, but that he is regarded as a *tabula rasa,* a white sheet of paper on which anyone can write out an identity for him and make him believe it.

It is the contrast of Lena Grove and Joe Christmas, of the country girl and the American wanderer, who is a stranger even to himself, the ultimate personification in modern loneliness, that frames the book—literally so, since Lena Grove begins and ends it, while Joe Christmas's agony and crucifixion are enacted as within a circle round which he runs in an effort to catch up with himself. When he finds that he cannot run out of this circle and stands still at last in order to die, the book comes back to Lena Grove and ends on her ritualistic procession up the road with her baby and Byron Bunch—Faulkner's version of the Holy Family. By the time we have finished *Light in August,* we have come to feel that the real greatness of Faulkner in this book (and indeed of his extraordinary compassion) lies in the amazing depth which he brings to this contrast of which American writers are so fond, particularly in Southern writing, between the natural and the urban, between Lena Grove's simplicity and the forces personified by Joe Christmas's walking all smooth city pavements with the same isolation and indifference, eating at the coldly smooth wooden counter, and murder. Faulkner even leads up to a strange and tortured fantasy of Joe Christmas as Lena Grove's still unnamed son. There is virtually an annunciation to Lena, in the moving last phase of the book when Lena, delivered of her child just as Joe Christmas is running for his life, hears Mrs. Hines, Christmas's grandmother, calling the baby "Joey"—he who is a "nigger" murderer, and whom Lena has never seen. The reader comes to this with a shock, only because of Faulkner's reckless, desperate eagerness to wrest all the possible implications from his material, to think it out interminably, since there is no end to all one's possible meditations round and round the human cycle. One of the

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conflicts of which the book is made—between life and anti-life, between the spirit of birth and the murderous abstractions and obsessions which drive most of the characters—is in Faulkner himself, in his attempt to will his painful material into a kind of harmony that it does not really possess.

But in any event, it is Lena who opens the book, Lena's world, Lena's patience, that set the ideal behind the book—that world of the permanent and the natural which Joe Christmas seeks all his life without knowing that he does, and seeking it, will run full tilt into the ground. "Light in August" is itself a country saying: Light as a mare or a cow is light after delivery. And it is this world of Lena Grove from Doane's Mill—the tiny hamlet which was too small for any post-office list; yet even Lena, living in the backwoods, had not seen it until her parents died—with the sound of the wagon wheel taking her away from it, that remains in the book not merely a world that Faulkner celebrates but a mythic source of strength. As indeed it is. For it is this intense sense of itself, it is this superb registering of country sights and sounds as the stillness is broken by the creaking and lumbering wagon coming up the hill, that is the secret of Southern writing. In his attachment to the irretrievable, in his obstinate feeling for the earth, the good Southern writer makes so much writing in America seem as shallow as if it had been composed by a young instructor in English sitting in his study surrounded by manuals on the great novels. Albert Camus, talking appreciatively about Southern novelists, once remarked to a friend of mine that what he liked about their books was "the dust and the heat." And to the man from North Africa, with his memories of that blazing world described in *Noces,* that world into which Paris can never enter, Faulkner's sense of local color must be especially moving. But after all, it is this sense of place that is the great thing about all American writing. It is the "mossy scabs of the worm fence, heap'd stones, elder, mullein and poke-weed" in *Song of Myself*; the landscape that in *Walden* seems always to be reflected in water; the strong native sense of the here and now that is the basis of Emerson's aesthetic; the edge of the world seen from Hemingway's Michigan woods; "reading the river" in *Life on the Mississippi* and *Huckleberry Finn*; the "snow, the real snow" seen only beyond Chicago that Scott Fitzgerald described so rapturously in his memories of Mid-

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westerners in Eastern colleges going home for Christmas. And if we ask what is so remarkable about that sense of place which is, after all, essential to imaginative writing, the answer is that we Americans are in fact just the opposite of the homogeneous mass we are always trying to be, and that what distinguishes American writing is exactly the fact that we are strangers to each other and that each writer describes his own world to strangers living in the same land with himself.

Now of all parts of the United States the South is certainly the strangest to the others; it is, in fact—or used to be—a separate nation. And almost all the good Southern writers have this sense of local color to an extreme, for to the same degree that the South is what it is because of its rural background, its "backwardness," its isolation, its comparatively homogeneous white population, to this same extent does the American need to value and venerate one's own region or place as the only escape from American bigness, American smoothness, American abstractness, American slogans, the juggernaut of American progress, find (at least it used to find) its deepest expression in the South. Even poverty, which in America certainly is a disgrace, becomes in Southern writing a sign of the natural man (Huckleberry Finn) or the earth-mother (Lena Grove). And, as so often happens in Southern writing—for the sensitive Southerners are likely to feel that they are lost in the modern industrial world and, in mourning their traditional homeland, to see the immediate world around them as damned—Faulkner's pictures of the impersonal modern world, the opposite of Lena's sacred grove, are lurid. As Lena is all fertility, the others are all barrenness. Destruction, fire, obsession, inhumanity, anonymity, the "frictionsmooth" wooden counter at which Joe Christmas eats, the hard cold eyes of Bobbie the prostitute and Mame the madam and Max the pimp: these against the images of locality, the farmers in their faded and patched but clean overalls, and of time, the wagon along the road and the "heelgnawed porch" of the country store around which the farmers sit. As soon as we get to Jefferson, we catch the typical dialectic of life and anti-life, the contrast of birth and destruction on which the book is founded, in the fact that the slow patient rhythms of Lena, the wagon, the road, are immediately followed by the whine of the saw in the planing mill, the reiteration of *smooth*.

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The world is narrowing down to the contest between the good Christian laborer, Byron Bunch, the very essence of the common ordinary good man, and those who, like Lena's seducer, have either taken on a name which is not their own, "Brown," a name too conventional even to be *his* name, or who, like Joe Christmas, have no name to begin with.

This contrast is familiar enough in Southern opinion, and one can find the same horror of miscegenation, of uprooting, of the city man's anonymity, in any expression of Southern agrarianism. But Faulkner does not stop at the abstraction of the alien: he carries it on, he carries it out, to astonishing lengths. And it is this intensity of conception that makes the portrait of Joe Christmas compelling rather than believable, makes him a source of wonder, of horror, yet above all of pity, rather than of pleasure in the creation of a real human being. For Joe Christmas remains, as he is born, an abstraction; from the moment he appears, "there was something definitely rootless about him, as though no town nor city was his, no street, no walls, no square of earth his home." He comes to work in the only clothes he has, a serge suit and a white shirt; and Byron Bunch, watching him, knows that Joe Christmas "carried his knowledge with him always as though it were a banner, with a quality ruthless, lonely, and almost proud." So from the moment Joe Christmas appears, he is seen as what others say about him, he is only a thought in other people's minds. More than this, he is looked at always from a distance, as if he were not quite human, which in many ways he is not.

*We* see Joe Christmas from a distance, and this distance is the actual space between him and his fellows. It is also the distance between the name "Joe Christmas," which is clownish, and the actual suffering of someone who has to live up to the non-humanity of his name, to the obsession (founded on hearsay, not on actual evidence) that his father had "some" Negro blood in him. Joe Christmas, then, is really "Man" trying to discover the particular kind of man he is. He is an abstraction created by the racist mania of his grandfather, a former preacher whose tormented life is spent insisting that Negroes are guilty in the eyes of God and must serve white men. When his daughter ran away with a "Mexican" circus hand, Doc Hines not merely killed the man, and, after his daughter

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died in childbirth on Christmas Eve, left the baby on the steps of an orphanage, but later took a job as a janitor in the orphanage in order to make sure that his "nigger" grandson would never be allowed to contaminate anyone. This obsessiveness about race goes hand in hand with a Calvinist obsession of the elect and of the hopeless sinfulness of others, an obsession which is found both in Joe Christmas's rigidly doctrinaire foster-father, Calvin MacEachern, and in his future mistress, Joanna Burden, a descendant of New Hampshire Puritans who remains in the South though she is the sworn enemy of its ways. All these obsessions about purity and guilt are, Faulkner indicates, the remnants of an inhuman religion that has added bigotry and arrogance to the curse of slavery. They are the symbols of a church that has lost its spiritual function, and that has been deserted by the Reverend Gail Hightower, who spends his days in endless reveries of the South's irretrievable glory. The obsessions are all summed up in the fate of Joe Christmas, who is trying to become *someone,* a human being, to find the integrity that is so ripely present in Lena Grove. Lena does not have to try; her symbol is the wheel on the road. Joe Christmas's is flight: flight on the same road, but flight toward himself, which he cannot reach, and away from hatred of himself, which he cannot escape. Only his pursuers catch up with him, to murder and to castrate him.

Joe Christmas is an abstraction seeking to become a human being. In the race-mad South, many a Negro—and Mexican, and Jew—is turned into an abstraction. But this man is *born* an abstraction and is seeking to become a person. He is an orphan, brought up in a foundling home, who in earliest childhood is watched by his own grandfather as if he were a caged beast. He is then bribed by the dietitian, whom he has heard making love with the interne, as if he knew enough to betray her. He is adopted by a farmer who re-names him, lectures him, starves him, beats him for not memorizing the Catechism. He is robbed and beaten by the pimp of the prostitute with whom he has fallen in love. He is constantly treated by his Negrophile mistress, Joanna Burden, as if his own personality were of no account and is beseeched in her sexual transports as "Negro." And finally, after being starved, betrayed, flogged, beaten, pursued by bloodhounds, he is castrated. The essential picture behind Joe Christmas is that of his grandfather carrying him to the or-

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phanage and then from it in a savage parody of loving care. Joe Christmas is nothing but the man things are done to, the man who has no free will of his own, who is constantly seeking a moment of rest ("When have I ever eaten in peace?") and who looks for an identity by deliberately provoking responses that will let him be *someone,* if only as a white man among Negroes, or as someone calling himself a Negro in an effort to shock the white prostitute he has just slept with. His passivity, his ability to lend himself to situations and to people who will "carry" him for awhile, is immense and pitiful.

Joe Christmas is the most solitary character in American fiction, the most extreme phase conceivable of American loneliness. He is never seen full face, but always as a silhouette, a dark shadow haunting others, a shadow upon the road he constantly runs—a foreshadowing of his crucifixion, which, so terrible and concentrated is his suffering, already haunts the lives of others like a black shadow. For, almost *because* he does not look it, he becomes the "Negro," or the thought of, the obsession with, Negroes in the minds of those who, looking at Joe Christmas, can think of nothing else. And Joanna Burden, whose abolitionist grandfather was murdered in the South, whose whole life has been an obstinate carrying-on, deep inside Mississippi, of her family's coldly abstract espousal of Negroes, shows us how much of an abstraction Joe Christmas is when she makes love crying to him "Negro! Negro!" Whether the "Negro" represents the white man's guilt or the white man's fear, he is always a thought in the white's mind—and in the South, an obsession. So Joanna Burden, who befriends him, and Doc Hines, who hates him, come to see in him the cause of guilt that is finally the image of guilt. "I thought," Joanna says to her lover,

> of all the children coming forever and ever into the world, white, with the black shadow already falling upon them before they draw breath. And I seemed to see the black shadow in the shape of a cross. And it seemed like the white babies were struggling, even before they drew breath, to escape from the shadow that was not only upon them but beneath them, too, flung out like their arms were flung out, as if they were nailed to the cross.

And she quotes her father: "In order to rise, you must raise

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the shadow with you. But you can never lift it to your level. I see that now, which I did not see until I came down here. But escape it you cannot. The curse of the black race is God's curse. But the curse of the white race is the black man who will be forever God's chosen own because He once cursed Him." The grounds of this obsession, then, can be a compassion for the Negro that is as profound as hatred, and equally removed from brotherhood. This compassion seems to me the essence of Faulkner's approach to Joe Christmas, and the triumph of the book is Faulkner's ability to keep his leading character a shadow, and yet to make us feel all his suffering. Compare Joe Christmas with the types of the Northerner, the city man, the "stranger" in Southern writing, to say nothing of the Negro, and you realize that where so many neo-orthodox Southern literary critics are hysterically fearful of the "stranger," Faulkner, by a tremendous and moving act of imagination, has found in Joe Christmas the incarnation of "man"—that is, of modern man, reduced entirely to his unsupported and inexplicable human feelings. There are no gods in Faulkner's world; there are only men—some are entirely subject to circumstances, some protest against them, some are even moved to change them. The hero of *A Fable* is of the last; Joe Christmas is of the first. He is human to us because of the experience he undergoes, but his passivity is so great that he is finally a body castrated, a mere corpse on a dissection table—or someone whose body has been turned into the host, material for a ritual, so that his last agony will earn him the respect he never earned while he was alive. He is not, like the Christ of *A Fable,* a man who gives new meaning to life; like Benjy in *The Sound and the Fury,* he is an incarnation of human suffering, unable to speak—except in the tremendous action near the end of the book when he stops running from his pursuers and waits for them, and attains in this first moment of selfhood, the martyrdom that ends it.

We see Joe Christmas always from a distance. This distance from ourselves to him seems to me the key to the book, for it explains why Joe exists for us principally as a man who is described, not seen. He is so far away that we cannot see him; he is reported to us. And this distance is filled with the stillness of a continuous meditation. *Light in August* tells a story of violence, but the book itself

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is curiously soundless, for it is full of people thinking to themselves about events past. As soon as Lena Grove arrives in Jefferson, at the end of the first chapter, the story of Joe Christmas comes to us through flashbacks, through talk by the other men at the planing mill, through a whole chapter of summary biography, through rumors and gossip by the townspeople, and at the very end, when Joe Christmas's whole story is put together for us, by Gavin Stevens's telling a stranger about the grandparents. Almost everything we learn about Joe Christmas comes to us in the form of hearsay, accusation, the tortured memories of others; even his death is told as an incident in the life of his murderer, Percy Grimm. All these reports about the stranger sufficiently suggest his alienation. But in themselves they also create that stillness, that depth of meditation into which all the characters are plunged.

This meditation begins in Joe Christmas himself, who in his distance from other men is constantly trying to think himself back to life, and who, without knowing exactly how his ordeal began—and certainly not why—finds himself like a caged animal going over and over the same ground. We hear him talking to himself, and we follow his slow and puzzled efforts to understand the effect of his actions upon others. We see him as a child in the orphanage, eating the toothpaste, frightening the dietitian out of her wits because he is staring straight at her, trying to understand what she is accusing him of. We watch him walking the path between his cabin and Joanna Burden's house for his meals, thinking out everything he finds between the four walls of her kitchen. Finally we watch him running, and thinking deliriously in his flight, until, in that magnificent and piercing scene near the end of his flight, he falls asleep as he runs. The pressure of thought, the torture of thought, is overwhelming—and useless, since Joe Christmas does not know who he is, and so cannot locate the first cause of his misery. But still he thinks, he broods, he watches, he waits. And it is this brooding silence in him, fixed in attention over he does not know what, that explains why he is so often described in the book as looking like a man in prayer—even like a "monk." There is a strange and disturbing stillness about him that eases him, more swiftly than most men, into the stillness of non-being.

The stillness of the book has, of course, an immense reverberation

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within it. Describing Doc Hines, Faulkner notes about him "a quality of outworn violence like a scent, an odor," and the actual violence of Joe Christmas is always felt about him even when he sits rigidly still at counters like a man in prayer. When Joe's back history is run off in the rapid newsreel style of Dos Passos, one feels not only his personal insignificance, but the just-leashed violence of American life of which Joe is, in his way, completely the creature:

> He stepped from the dark porch, into the moonlight, and with his bloody head and his empty stomach hot, savage, and courageous with whiskey, he entered the street which was to run for fifteen years.
>
> The whiskey died away in time and was renewed and died again, but the street ran on. From that night the thousand streets ran as one street, with imperceptible corners and changes of scene, broken by intervals of begged and stolen rides, on trains and trucks, and on country wagons with he at twenty and twentyfive and thirty sitting on the seat with his still, hard face and the clothes (even when soiled and worn) of a city man and the driver of the wagon not knowing who or what the passenger was and not daring to ask.

Yet it is a stillness of thought that generally pervades the book, in the form of enormous meditations by which Faulkner tries to lift his material into place. The stillness is interrupted by shooting, burning, beating, the barking of bloodhounds and Percy Grimm's mutilation of Joe Christmas, which interrupt like the sound which nails must make when they are driven into wood through human flesh. Yet, just behind this obvious figure of the Roman soldier torturing Christ, there is a pastoral world. As Irving Howe has noted, the arrangement of the book "resembles an early Renaissance painting—in the foreground a bleeding martyr, far to the rear a scene of bucolic peacefulness, with women quietly working in the fields." Despite its violence, *Light in August* is one of the few American novels that remind one of the humanized and tranquil landscape in European novels. Its stillness is rooted in the peaceful and timeless world which Lena Grove personifies and in which she has her being. It is the stillness of the personal darkness inside which Joe Christmas lives. But this stillness is also the sickly, after-dark silence of the Reverend Gail Hightower sitting in his study, with his stale clothes and stale thoughts, going over and over the tragedy of

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his life, his grandfather's "glorious" death, his wife's desertion and suicide—and finally and typically summing it all up into a stale round of human illusion and defeat. Faulkner wishes us to understand that Hightower finally cuts the gordian knot of his thoughts when he delivers Lena's baby and is finally struck down by Percy Grimm as he stands between him and Joe Christmas. But Hightower, whether brooding out upon the street from behind the study window, or sitting behind the green lamp in his parlor when he receives Byron Bunch, his only visitor, enlarges the stillness, increases its weight, by personifying what is immediately present in the book, and throughout Faulkner's novels—the Southern effort to explain, to justify, and through some consummation in violent physical action even to lighten, the burden of this obsession with the past.

Hightower, by general consent, is one of the failures of the book: he is too vague, too drooping, too formless, in a word too much the creature of defeat and of obsession, to compel our interest or our belief. But this is so partly because Hightower is both a surrogate figure for Faulkner's meditations and a kind of scapegoat on whom Faulkner can discharge his exasperation with Southern nostalgia and the endless searching in the labyrinths of the past for the explanation of the Southern defeat and of the hold it keeps on the descendants of the Confederate aristocracy. Hightower is a failure because Faulkner both uses and parodies him. Because of the absurdly literal symbolism of his name, his constant watchful position behind the green lamp, his useless reveries, he is never on the same scale as the other characters, who are equally obsessed by the past, but who function on the plane of some positive action. Hightower not only lives by his thoughts; he has no life but his thoughts. We miss in him the life-like element of violence (the only possible end to characters so entirely formed of reverie) that we find in Joanna Burden's degeneration, in Joe Christmas's hatred, in Percy Grimm's fanaticism, in Doc Hines's mania. Hightower, acting in various sections of the book as a foreground observer, brings to them not merely a stillness but a deadness which intervenes between us and the other characters. This shapeless, ghostly body of thought has its symbolic place in the mind of Hightower. For just as his life is over, and he has no function but to brood, so Faulkner has signified in Hightower that wholly retrospective, watchful concern, not with the past but

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with their bondage to the past, that seems to me the essence of what Faulkner's characters are always thinking about.

Joe Christmas, Joanna Burden, Gail Hightower—each of these is the prisoner of his own history, and is trying to come to terms with this servitude in his own mind. That none of them can ever lift himself out of the circumstances that enclose him, Faulkner sees as the condition of man. Man is engulfed in events that are always too much for him. Hightower, listening to Byron Bunch make plans for Lena's confinement, thinks: "It is because so much happens. Too much happens. That's it. Man performs, engenders, so much more than he can or should have to bear. That's how he finds out that he can bear anything. That's it. That's what is so terrible. That he can bear anything, anything." Endurance, as we know, is the key word in Faulkner's system of values. At least this was so up to *A Fable*. There, Faulkner himself has told us, the highest value is represented not by the young Jewish pilot officer who said, "This is terrible. I refuse to accept it, even if I must refuse life to do so"; not by the old French quartermaster general who said, "This is terrible, but we can weep and bear it"; but by the English battalion runner who said, "This is terrible, I'm going to do something about it." *Light in August* does not arrive at this step. Man never thinks of changing the world; it is all he can do to get a grip on it, to understand some part of what has happened to him and to endure all of it. Any release that occurs is a purely individual one, as when Hightower finally frees himself, in the one profoundly unselfish act of his life, by delivering Lena's baby. In the freshness of the early morning, after Lena has given birth, Hightower feels that he is in touch with the earth again—the symbol throughout the book of rightness, authenticity, peace. But the earth is not his life, as it is Lena Grove's. Man's highest aim in this book is to meet his destiny without everlasting self-concern. Yet this profoundly tragic cast to *Light in August,* so much like a Hardy novel in the implacable pattern that unrolls against a country background and in the inarticulate stillness of its leading characters, is matched by Faulkner's ironic awareness that man, even in his endless brooding over the event, can never stop, that the event is nothing compared with the speculation that follows and in a sense replaces it. One of the most revealing phrases in Faulkner's rhetoric is: "not that"—it is not peace, not an end,

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that his people ever want. The violence may be "outworn," but it is the human passion. He describes his chorus, the townspeople, scurrying around Joanna Burden's house after her murder, looking "for someone to crucify":

> But there wasn't anybody. She had lived such a quiet life, attended so to her own affairs, that she bequeathed to the town in which she had been born and lived and died a foreigner, an outlander, a kind of heritage of astonishment and outrage, for which, even though she had supplied them at last with an emotional barbecue, a Roman holiday almost, they would never forgive her and let her be dead in peace and quiet. Not that. Peace is not that often. So they moiled and clotted, believing that the flames, the blood, the body that had died three years ago and had just now begun to live again, cried out for vengeance, not believing that the rapt infury of the flames and the immobility of the body were both affirmations of an attained bourne beyond the hurt and harm of man. Not that.

We can never let the event go, for that would mean an end to the human history that is lived in retrospection. Just as Faulkner's language is full of words, like "avatar" and "outrage," which are really private symbols left over from his unceasing meditation, and just as his style is formed from the fierce inner pressure of problems which give no solution, so the actual texture of *Light in August* suggests, in the tension and repetition of certain verbal motifs, that man can never quite say what the event originally meant, or what he is to think of it now. Language never quite comes up to the meaning of events. To adapt Faulkner's phrase, it is not that, or that. The townspeople exist in *Light in August,* as in so many Faulkner novels, to ask questions whose very function is to deny the possibility of an answer. Faulkner's grim sarcastic asides show that he views language as in some basic sense unavailing. The astounding repetition of certain key phrases and verbal rhythms in his work signifies his return back and back on the question.

Call the event history, call it the Fall: man is forever engaged in meditating, not the past itself, for that would bring knowledge, but man's guilt, for that may bring freedom. Guilt, not history, is the nightmare from which all of Faulkner's deepest characters are trying to escape. The guilt arises from man's endless complicity in his own history, as when the innocent, gravely staring child that Joe

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Christmas was, ate her toothpaste and listened to the dietitian making love. Hightower is guilty because his sickly, foolish nostalgia for his grandfather's one day of glory made him unavailable to his own wife, who committed suicide; Joanna Burden feels so guilty that she has remained an alien in the Southern town in which she was born, accepting her isolation as the price of her identification both with her Abolitionist forebears, who were shot down in the South, and with the Negroes, on whom a curse must have been laid. Even Doc Hines and Percy Grimm murder in order to "clean" life of the stain that Negroes have put on it, for as the Negroes were cursed by God, so they have cursed life, and the maniac "saviors" of Southern racial purity have to save their hallowed country from contagion. But just as no one of them can really distinguish the hate they feel for others from self-accusation, so no one can say with whom guilt began, where the ultimate human crime was committed. The paths which lead back to the human past are endless through the human brain, and sitting at his study window after he has gained new self-respect by delivering Lena's baby and by standing up to Percy Grimm, the dying Hightower still ruminates, goes over and over the past, as "the final copper light of afternoon fades" and "the world hangs in a green suspension in color and texture like through colored glass." The everlasting reverie begins again, but now the wheel of life that brought Lena Grove to Jefferson begins to slow down, runs into sand, "the axle, the vehicle, the power which propels it not yet aware." These memories are endless, and the style in which they are described is over-colored in a way that shows how static action often becomes in Faulkner's work, how much it serves as the raw material for reflection, which is why he can lavish so many Joycean compound words on objects which do not seem to move of their own accord, but to be rallying points in Faulkner's tortured concern with guilt.

Guilt is endless; in the labyrinths of the mind, there is turning, but no deliverance. Like T. S. Eliot, Faulkner is a favorite today because he takes his stand on human guilt; this is the side of ourselves that we can recognize, and, curiously, stand by; for in this alone, as we feel, is the possibility of our freedom. When men feel so wretchedly small before their own past, they must be guilty. So runs the legend. This is the argument behind Faulkner's novels: of the God who made Yoknapatawpha County. In the beginning, life

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was free and good and natural; but something inexplicable, a curse, was put on it. Perhaps the curse is nothing more than man's effort to get the better of events that are "too much for us"; the evil lies in arrogance. Doc Hines hears God addressing him personally, ordering him to act for Him. Calvin MacEachern, Joe Christmas's adopted father, starves and beats him because he cannot memorize portions of the catechism on order. "He asked that the child's stubborn heart be softened and that the sin of disobedience be forgiven him also, through the advocacy of the man whom he had flouted and disobeyed, requesting that Almighty be as magnanimous as himself, and by and through and because of conscious grace." Even Joanna Burden tries to play God to her Negro charges. *Light in August* is one of the sharpest criticisms of Calvinism ever written, but unlike so many Southern writers on Puritanism, Faulkner knows that the same religion is found in Doc Hines and Joanna Burden. The guilt that is the mainstay of their faith is embodied in the assumption of excessive authority by fathers, law-givers, teachers, ministers. Everyone wants to play God to the orphan Joe Christmas. In Faulkner's eyes, life is an ironic and tragic affair that is beyond human rule and misrule; but Calvinists like Doc Hines and Calvin MacEachern, or the children of Calvinists like Joanna Burden, even murdering simon-pure "patriots" like Percy Grimm, take life in their hands, they dominate, and they murder. Joe Christmas is their favorite charge; he is the man "things are done to." His final ignominy comes when his mistress, Joanna Burden, regarding him in her new phase as a Negro charge to be "brought up," tells him that she wants him to go to school so that he can become a lawyer. And it is at this point that he breaks. It is this point that has always been the signature of the everlasting victim. Other men are the law-givers; the law is passed out to him, through him, inflicted on him. And so finally he murders and dies, a pure victim, shot, castrated, treated like a thing. It is the final ignominy. But in the very unattainability of his suffering, in its inexpressibility, is the key to his healing power over others. For where life exists so much in the relation of master to man, of the elect to the sinner, the only possible consummation man can ever reach, for Joe Christmas as for Uncle Tom, is in the final consistency of his suffering, in a fate so extreme that it becomes a single human word which men can read. This is what Faulkner

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means in that exalted passage after Joe Christmas's immolation:

> . . . when they saw what Grimm was doing one of the men gave a choked cry and stumbled back into the wall and began to vomit. Then Grimm too sprang back, flinging behind him the bloody butcher knife. "Now you'll let white women alone, even in hell," he said. But the man on the floor had not moved. He just lay there, with his eyes open and empty of everything save consciousness, and with something, a shadow, about his mouth. For a long moment he looked up at them with peaceful and unfathomable and unbearable eyes. Then his face, body, all, seemed to collapse, to fall in upon itself, and from out the slashed garments about his hips and loins the pent black blood seemed to rush like a released breath. It seemed to rush out of his pale body like the rush of sparks from a rising rocket; upon that black blast the man seemed to rise soaring into their memories forever and ever. They are not to lose it, in whatever peaceful valleys, beside whatever placid and reassuring streams of old age, in the mirroring faces of whatever children they will contemplate old disasters and newer hopes. It will be there, musing, quiet, steadfast, not fading and not particularly threatful, but of itself alone serene, of itself alone triumphant.

Joe Christmas has attained the stillness that will finally allow us to see him. Of sufferings alone is he made, and in this sense, and in this sense alone, is he a figure whose condition is so total that he reminds us of Christ in the sense of Christ's integrality. That tortured and would-be Christian philosopher, Simone Weil, understood this when she found in *malheur,* affliction, that it could become so much in itself that she felt riven to the universe by bonds of pain. The arch-victim may not be a "martyr," as students of modern totalitarianism have noticed, but there is a kind of suffering in our time which is so extreme that it becomes an integral *fact* of the human condition. Father Zossima bowed down to Dmitri Karamazov because of all the affliction he would undergo. So marvelous is Faulkner's compassion, he can visualize in the man who was nothing but a victim, the shadow thrown from the Cross of Christ, who was nothing, as it were, but Himself. Men are men because events are always "too much" for them; Joe Christmas became one with his life in that extreme moment when even he had no longer to search out the past. The figure on the Cross is the most tremendous interventive symbol in history; the castrated man on the floor has only one free power in his life—to stop running at last and to face his murderer. Faulkner

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intends no parody; he is moved by the likeness of totality to totality. But neither is he a Christian. There is no redemption; there is not even in *A Fable*—but there man has the courage to redeem circumstances by denying their fatality. In *Light in August* the past is not merely exigent; it is even malicious, the spirit of pure bad luck, a god-like force that confronts man at every turn with everything he has been, and so seems to mock and to oppose him. This is called "The Player": Lena's seducer, "Brown," still running away from her at the last, sends a Negro boy to the sheriff for the reward money he has earned in informing on Joe Christmas, but knows despairingly that he will never see the money.

'He wont do it. He cant do it. I know he cant find him, cant get it, bring it back.' He called no names, thought no names. It seemed to him now that they were all just shapes like chessmen—the negro, the sheriff, the money, all—unpredictable and without reason moved here and there by an Opponent who could read his moves before he made them and who created spontaneous rules which he and not the Opponent, must follow.

This is the Opponent that Joe Christmas decides finally not to elude again, the "Player" who moves Percy Grimm unerringly from position to position:

He was beside the ditch now. He stopped, motionless in midstride. Above the blunt, cold rake of the automatic his face had that serene, unearthly luminousness of angels in church windows. He was moving again almost before he had stopped, with that lean, swift, blind obedience to whatever Player moved him on the Board. He ran to the ditch.

All things are fated; man is in any place because the Player moved him there. Our past sets up the positions into which we fall. This is why Joe Christmas's grandmother, Mrs. Hines, utters the most significant lines in the book when, at the end, she pitifully cries out:

"I am not saying that he never did what they say he did. Ought not to suffer for it like he made them that loved and lost suffer. But if folks could maybe just let him for one day. Like it hadn't happened yet. Like the world never had anything against him yet. Then it could be like he had just went on a trip and grew man grown and come back. If it could be like that for just one day."

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And it is in these terms that we come to understand why Joe Christmas, in running away from a past that he cannot escape, seems constantly to be looking back as he runs. Not only is no one free of his past; he even has, at the most critical moments, the sense not of moving at all, but of being silently lifted from position to position. It is because of this curious effect of immobility in Faulkner's characters as they run (as if they were held up in the air by wires), that Faulkner can lavish such idle poetic largesse upon them: can see in a Percy Grimm that "serene, unearthly luminousness of angels in church windows," and at various points throughout the book emphasize Joe Christmas's rigid likeness to a man in prayer. Even the countrymen in overalls move at one point "with almost the air of monks in a cloister." The reason is that all these characters are lost in contemplation as they are moved here and there by the Player. There is no free action for anyone: everyone is carried, as Lena Grove was carried to Jefferson in a whole succession of farm wagons, by the fate that was and so shall be.

Faulkner's world is grim—a world in which the Past exerts an irresistible force, but against which there is no supernatural sanction, no redeeming belief. He believes in original sin, but not in divine love, and he is endlessly bemused by the human effort to read fate or to avoid it. The highest reach of his belief is the effort to become "a saint without God" (Albert Camus), but this is a point not yet tried for in *Light in August*. Correspondingly, there is great power in his work, but little color, and *Light in August,* for all its brilliance, somehow wears the lack-luster look of the year in which it was published, 1932. It is a grim book, and the countryside described in it already has the pinched, rotted look that one sees in so many depression novels about the South. The greatest fault of the book is its overschematic, intellectualized cast. Although Faulkner himself has lived more like Joe Christmas than like the Sartorises, he is socially far from the world of Joe Christmas and Lena Grove, and there are tell-tale signs in the novel that it is written *down*—for Faulkner, too much from his head down, and about people whom he tends to generalize and to overpraise, as if he saw them only as symbols rather than as entirely complex beings. And it is a simple fact that the opening of *Light in August* is so beautiful that nothing else quite comes up to it.

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On the other hand, it is one of Faulkner's greatest books, and although it does not have the blazing directness of *The Sound and the Fury* (a book written more directly out of Faulkner's own experience), it has much of the creative audacity which is Faulkner's highest ideal in art. With this book, published in 1932, Faulkner completed a period of extraordinary fertility. He was only thirty-five; since 1929, he had published, in rapid order, *Sartoris, The Sound and the Fury, As I Lay Dying, Sanctuary,* and *Light in August.* It was a period of tremendous creative power. When he was recently in Japan, Faulkner said of this time:—"I think there's a period in a writer's life when he, well, simply for lack of any other word, is fertile and he just produces. Later on, his blood slows, his bones get a little more brittle, his muscles get a little stiff, he gets perhaps other interests, but I think there's one time in his life when he writes at the top of his talent plus his speed, too. Later the speed slows; the talent doesn't necessarily have to fade at the same time. But there's a time in his life, one matchless time, when they are matched completely. The speed, and the power and the talent, they're all there and then he is . . . 'hot.' "

*Light in August* comes out of that "one matchless time." The only possible objection one can have to the book is the number of implications which Faulkner tries to bring out of his material—for just as the characters' own lives are "set" for them to mull over, so Faulkner constantly mulls over them, wringing a poetry that has grandeur but also an intensity of contemplation that is sometimes more furious in expression than meaningful in content. If we see Faulkner's narrative method as essentially recollective, in the form of individual meditation over past events, we can recognize the advantage he has over most "naturalistic" writers and we understand why Faulkner refers to himself as a "poet." For what makes the portrait of Joe Christmas so astonishing is the energy of imagination lavished upon it, the consistency of texture that derives from the poet's sense that he has not only to *show,* in the modern realistic sense, but to *say*—that is, to tell a story which follows from his contemplation of the world, and which preserves, in the nobility of its style and in the serene independence of its technique, the human victory over circumstances.

It is this that makes us hear Faulkner's own voice throughout

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the book, that allows him to pull off the tremendous feat of making us believe in a character who in many ways is not a human being at all—but struggling to become one. And this, after all, is the great problem of the novelist today. Joe Christmas is an incarnation not only of the "race problem" in America, but of the condition of man. More and more, not merely the American novel, but all serious contemporary novels, are concerned with men who are not real enough to themselves to be seriously in conflict with other men. Their conflicts, as we say, are "internal"; for they are seeking to become *someone*. Joe Christmas lives a life that is not only solitary but detached. He lives in society physically, but actually he is concerned only with the process of self-discovery, or of self-naming, even of self-legalization. This is a fate which, as we know, can be as arduous and deadly as that of the classic heroes. But in Joe Christmas's case, there is no conflict from positions of strength, no engagement between man and man—only the search of the "stranger," *l'étranger,* to become man.

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Richard Wollheim

# THE NEW CONSERVATISM IN BRITAIN

Someone once remarked that if the cyclical theory of history were true, it would be only because people believed in it, and in this remark, seemingly an expression of faded idealism, there is much sound commonsensical truth about human nature. In the domain of man as opposed to that of nature, whether things happen or not is by no means independent of whether we think they will. The revolutions described by the heavenly bodies may be indifferent to our beliefs and opinions about them, to our efforts to anticipate or prevent or predict them; those devised by human beings most certainly are not. From which it follows that if there is a revival of conservatism in Britain today, it must be in some way connected with the fact that people have for so long been saying that the time has come round for one.

A more profitable question, however, is whether there is in fact a revival of conservatism. A difficult question to answer: difficult because it's difficult to know what should count as an answer. What is a revival? And what is conservatism?

It may be said in the most general terms that left-wing views express themselves most naturally in principles: and right-wing views not in principles but in arguments—in arguments, that is, directed against those principles. Historically these arguments fall into three fairly well-defined groups. First there are the arguments asserting that the principles of the Left are false because they are incompatible with, or offend against, some true conception or vision of society, generally a vision more refined or spiritual in character, of which a profounder kind of knowledge is obtainable through the happy light of faith or 'true reason' or perhaps the happy darkness of preju-

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dice. Secondly there are those arguments which assert that the principles of the Left are wrong because they lay claim to, or presuppose further principles that themselves lay claim to knowledge that, in the nature of circumstances or perhaps in the very nature of things, we do not or cannot possess. Arguments of the first kind assert that there is a better kind of knowledge than that claimed by the liberal about what society should be like, and so collectively might be known as the Argument from Knowledge: arguments of the second kind assert that the knowledge claimed by the liberal about what society should be like can't be as good as he thinks it is, and so collectively might be known as the Argument from Ignorance. The third kind of argument employed by the Right is that which, while not expressly finding fault with any of the individual principles of the Left, asserts that taken as a set they are clearly inconsistent: the point being of course that of any pair of incompatible propositions, at least one member must be false. Arguments of this form might be known as the Argument from Incompatibility.

The third argument is at once the simplest, the most acceptable, and the least effective. It is an undeniable fact that within any of the more familiar sets of left-wing principles conflict can break out: as, for instance, between Liberty and Equality. The point can be made not only by abstract reasoning, by consideration of imaginary cases and extreme situations, but by appeal to actual historical evidence: indeed by some terrible dialectic—which seems always to give grim pleasure to the Right—History often enough overtakes Logic, so something devised in the study as a merely hypothetical case soon turns into a headline in a newspaper. But too much can easily be made of this point. If it is to be a conclusive argument against the principles of the Left, then it must do more than show merely that these principles are incompatible in the ordinary sense of the term: namely, that on not every single issue are the deliverances of all the principles bound or even likely to be unanimous. For incompatibility in this weak sense is surely just what we should expect to find holding between the different rules or principles constitutive of any moral system worthy of serious attention, of any code of behavior large enough for human beings to live by. And not merely what we should expect to find, but what we do find: the principles of '89—"Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, those three noble but incompatible ideals," as

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a conservative writer once called them—are certainly no more "incompatible" than the Ten Commandments. No, if the argument from Incompatibility is really to be effective, then it must show that the principles of the Left are incompatible in a far stronger sense, in that on most issues or on most serious issues the deliverance of one principle is likely to conflict with the deliverance of some other principle. This, however, the argument never does: and it doesn't, I suspect, because it can't. It is indeed at this stage worth remembering that this argument as turned in an anti-liberal direction received its finest, its classic formulation from the two greatest liberals of the great Age of Liberalism, Alexis de Tocqueville and John Stuart Mill. They however did not jump to the conclusion that liberalism was wrong: the only moral they drew was that liberals should be careful. Surely here, as so often elsewhere, they were dead right.

If this is so, then it is to the other two arguments in the right-wing armory, to what I have called the Argument from Knowledge and the Argument from Ignorance, that we should turn in our search for a revived conservatism. Is there anything in the contemporary vicissitudes of these two arguments that suggests that new life or energy has been injected into the cause that uses them? Has either of them been given a new slant or twist, been in any way overhauled or refitted, so as to be peculiarly adapted to modern conditions?

Here, at the outset, we come up against a rather unexpected fact: unexpected in itself and in the way it divides the conservatism of modern Britain from that of modern America. In Britain today there is no conservative intellectual of any stature or influence who would rest his objection to the doctrines of the Left on the brighter vision of some alternative society. The ground of British conservatism today—by which of course I mean the open and visible ground—is skepticism and empiricism, not faith or reason. The Argument from Ignorance is in, the Argument from Knowledge is out. All of which must seem very strange to an American conservative who would naturally expect to find the traditional views that he clings to, clung to nowhere with so much tenacity and sense of inner conviction as in the traditional lands. Strange—and also somewhat disconcerting. For if in New England people find it beneficial and soothing and somehow *relevant* to dream of old England, why is it that in old

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England they appear to have something better to do?

The American conservative might reasonably feel that he is entitled to an answer on this score, and it is indeed a matter of general curiosity. The answer of course is complex. Very roughly it might be said that there are current in the political imagination of the West today three large generous articulated visions of society magnetic enough in their appeal to pull modern man off his historical course, to make him want to reverse his steps or at any rate to stay them and to curse those who would jostle him on. These visions are of the Catholic Society, the Aristocratic Society, and the Middle-Class Society. Why is it that whereas in the traditionally more rationalistic parts of the world, on the continent of Europe and in the United States, these visions claim many addicts, among the mists of England —above a certain level at any rate—they count for nothing? The reasons vary, I think, in each case.

Take Catholicism first. It is certainly not enough to say that Britain is a Protestant country: on the contrary, the Roman Catholic Church is an increasingly powerful force in the religious life of the country—just after the war, for instance, there were three million Catholic Easter communicants to two and a half million of the Church of England. At quite a number of points, some of them of importance, new converts are being won. But just for this very reason, the Catholic Church is singularly self-effacing in the matter of politics, particularly in any general form. There are, I think, only two traces of a political character in the 'racial memory' of the English: a scorn for Egyptians, and a fear of Catholicism when conjoined with politics. Like all memories, while they are dormant, they lie so low that they are thought to be dead. But touch them and they bite. Part of the traditional wisdom of the Catholic Church is that it knows things of this sort. Consider for a moment the organization of the Catholic press in England—the way it is carefully 'tiered' so that for each class in the country there is a separate paper and each paper carries among other things the particular political views attuned to its particular class. Here we have a symbol of general Catholic strategy in England. Books may appear—as they do —on the political views of Newman or Belloc, and may even have—as they do—some considerable measure of success, but ultimately they count for nothing: they are intended as sweets rather than as

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medicine—to give pleasure to those who like that sort of thing, not to do good to anyone. The overriding political aim of the Church in England is to keep as much 'optional' as possible: and this of course is quite inconsistent with any large imaginative reconstruction of society.

Of the Aristocratic Society we hear if anything even less: which must be particularly irritating to the American Tory. (Rather as if poor Strether had discovered, when he finally solved the mystery, that what Madame de Vionnet had been engaged in all the while was elaborate negotiations for emigrating to the New World.) Once again, the reason for this silence is not the obvious one: namely, that aristocratic life has been so recently and so painfully extinguished in Britain that the whole subject is a sore one. On the contrary: though aristocratic life has like other forms of privilege suffered considerably from the redistributive measures of recent years, what is really interesting and remarkable is the extent to which it has survived. Members of great families and owners of large houses pay heavy taxes, suffer from the high cost of living, find servants difficult to get, and live in the shadow not only of death but of death duties: on the other hand, given any practical ability, they make large untaxed capital gains, lend well-paid prestige to company boards, open their houses to an enthusiastic public, exploit the numerous loopholes in the fiscal system and in the normal course of events die with their money safely in their children's hands. Scattered across England there survives a form of life that combines, effectively and without detriment to either element, the privileges of the eighteenth century and the comforts of the twentieth. That this is so is entirely the work of the upper classes themselves, plus their legal and financial advisers, and the whole success of this delicate operation can be directly ascribed to one simple technique: silence. In 1911 during the stormy debate that immediately preceded the passing of the Parliament Act, Lord Selborne, a man of extreme views, declared to the delight of his more intransigent fellow peers that their Lordships would not "perish in the dark": forty years later, the sons of those who applauded his words are delighted to live in the dark. For only thus can they (by their standards) live at all.

Here then we have the major case, if never presented more than unconsciously, against any statement of true Toryism. For its effect

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would be to let the left hand of the country know what its right hand is doing. In the life of the present Parliament there has, more than once, come before the House of Commons a Private Member's bill designed to prevent newspapers from publishing the details of wills and bequests. What the supporters of this measure were trying to do on a humble scale—to choke up the sources of 'social envy,' as it is euphemistically called in England today—would be undone on a large scale and *quite gratuitously* by the scribes and publicists of an 'aristocratic' political theory.

This practical conspiracy of silence is reinforced and cemented at its weaker points by a well-known though certainly not overestimated feature of English life: snobbery. (No one who does not know Britain can appreciate the real power of snobbery within it. Of course a great deal has been written about snobbery. But in English literature snobbery nearly always appears as a comic subject: in English life it doesn't.) Those not acquainted with country-house life do not wish to make themselves ridiculous by getting it wrong, whereas those who are acquainted with it do not wish to make themselves even more ridiculous by taking it too seriously. Indeed it is likely that snobbery not merely runs parallel to, but also has more direct links with, the whole strategy of expediency: it is as if the upper classes finding it necessary to wear a certain kind of protective clothing, tried to supplement the arguments of necessity by declaring this also to be the height of fashion. A trivial but indicative example of this tendency was the reception afforded to an article that appeared in *Encounter* last year by Miss Nancy Mitford on the differences between upper-class and non-upper-class speech ("U" and "non-U"). The article aroused large-scale interest (*Encounter* even issued separate off-prints of it, presumably in the cause of 'cultural freedom') and a certain amount of resentment. This resentment, however, came not from those who did badly in the test (on the contrary it assured them of a way of doing better next time), but from those who did, or would have done, well in it. For them it did the unmentionable thing: it blew the gaff. (Favorite reactions: "I think that that article of Nancy's was, if I may use the expression for a moment, the most non-U thing I have ever read": "It all seems to me so unnecessary.")

The general point might be put like this: In Professor Russell

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Kirk's *The Conservative Mind* the connection between the quality of life that he praises in the text of the book and the houses that he mentions in the preface as the places where he wrote it, is embarrassingly apparent. For an English writer of comparable sophistication the connection would have worked rather differently: if he had stayed in those or similar houses, then he wouldn't have written the book at all. Professor Kirk refers in this same preface to the "unbought graces of life": nowadays these are sold in England at the price of silence.

Finally of the middle-class ideal, of the conception of society as preserved from tyranny and philistinism and disorder by a minority of intelligent, cultivated, liberty-loving, property-owning families, we hear a little more but not much. One book, *The English Middle Classes* by Roy Lewis and Angus Maude, attracted in its day—1949 onwards—a considerable amount of interest, but more on account of its clever perverse partisanship than of any imaginative appeal it tried to exercise. The ordinary Englishman is not much given to romantic ideas in politics, but when he does give himself to one, he demands that it be genuinely and full-bloodedly romantic. And the cause of the middle classes, whatever it may be, is certainly not that. The very name conjures up *The Diary of a Nobody,* and any attempt to go beyond this and delineate the actual virtues of this way of life can never do much better than skirt the ridiculous. Take for example the most distinguished contemporary draughtsman of the subject, Mr. E. M. Forster: one is aware even in his most touching sketches of quiet civilizated professional life that one has only to alter a phrase or two and one would have something in praise of 'gracious living.' Scratch the Schlegels, and you have Mrs. Miniver. Again, just the very modesty of the middle-class ideal makes any explicit description of it peculiarly vulnerable to social criticism. For whereas it is perfectly possible to think of aristocratic life as existing in some kind of economic vacuum, with no visible means of support, it is impossible even to start describing middle-class life without at once inserting into one's description references to an economic and social context: a small unearned income, domestic servants, fee-paying education—so that straightway one finds oneself involved in controversial issues. There is, as it were, no moment at which one can stand back from a portrait of middle-class life and say "That is the good side,

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that's the profit side—now, if you like, let's see what it costs": for even in the making up of the accounts, the two sides have a habit of fusing. In consequence those who defend the middle-class ideal tend to take the bit between their teeth at the earliest possible moment and defy all criticism that might come their way with a bravado that may excite admiration but is scarcely calculated to win support. For this reason and others, the word "middle-class," when it appears as part of a specifically political label, serves as the English translation of "*poujadiste*" and is fast on its way to becoming one of the unmentionable words in the contemporary political vocabulary.

Here then we see in England today the bankruptcy of the Argument from Knowledge. (But what, it will be asked at this stage, of Mr. Eliot and his "Christian society"? The question however rightly goes into parentheses. For though Mr. Eliot stands in the highest esteem as a poet, though as a playwright he enjoys a popularity usually reserved for those who can write good parts for the matinee idols of the day, his political and social writings do not receive any serious attention—except perhaps from those oversolemn admirers who from time to time feel compelled to defend him from loose charges of being a 'crypto-fascist.')

We are then by elimination left with the Argument from Ignorance as the vehicle of whatever is both new and thoughtful in modern conservatism, and it certainly does seem to be the case that in so far as there is a movement critical in an informed way of the doctrines of the Left, it is bound up with skepticism. And in saying this I have the support of Mr. T. E. Utley, a conservative intellectual himself who is also a discriminating and subtle purveyor of conservative thought. Writing about a large and confused body of opinion which he collectively calls "reaction," he says:

> The demand for empiricism, though it has Conservative antecedents, has also a certain kind of Liberal ancestry. But whatever its pedigree—and however much encumbered by its own clichés—it is this appeal to empiricism that is the only valuable—and genuinely Conservative—element in the emotional revulsion which I have described ("Reaction", *The Twentieth Century,* January 1957).

(And by "empiricism", Mr. Utley following standard conservative practice means of course "skepticism".)

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This having been said, a certain number of vital qualifications and discriminations must be made. In the first place, the most important single force working for skepticism in Great Britain today and intellectually both the most reputable and the most formidable—by which I mean linguistic and analytical philosophy—has absolutely nothing to do with conservatism. Critical as it is of traditional values, indeed of the whole notion of 'a traditional value,' insistent (in whatever form we take it) on the overriding importance of individual choice or taste in the adoption of values, it has quite rightly always been regarded by the Right with extreme suspicion and disfavor. Furthermore, as a historical fact, nearly all the practitioners of the subject have been on the Left. One of the most-read and most-discussed philosophical books of recent years, T. D. Weldon's *Vocabulary of Politics,* in which the implications of linguistic philosophy for politics are drawn out into the crudest and most uncompromising skepticism, is the work of a socialist. Indeed, it might be said that if one was looking out in England for survivors of that dying species, the *homme de gauche,* I do not know a group or profession among which one would do better than academic philosophers. Readers of the *New Statesman,* it is true, may well have formed a different impression, for that periodical has for reasons best known to its editorial staff been carrying on for a number of years now a sporadic vendetta against what it insists on calling "Logical Positivism," which it regards as the natural harbinger of reaction and fascism. These effusions are however on about the same level as Catholic outbursts against Freemasonry, and should be treated as belonging to the *bondieuserie,* rather than to the serious literature, of the Left.

Secondly, the skepticism that does go toward conservatism falls into two broad categories, depending on its source or origin. On the one hand there is the skepticism that is the application to politics of a yet more general skepticism: on the other hand, there is the skepticism that is narrowly political, being the counterpart of a devout fideism elsewhere. The very real division between these two kinds of skepticism has been overlaid and obscured by the common service into which both are pressed and by a number of other factors, foremost among which is the almost legendary respect in which the name of Edmund Burke is held in both camps. Of course it is, strictly speaking, only skeptics of the second kind who are entitled to claim

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descent from the historical Burke: in the writings of the more thoroughgoing antinomians there isn't, and of necessity can't be, anything corresponding to some of his central doctrines such as Providence and the "divine tactic." However all this has come to be rather overlooked under the influence of a synthetic image of Burke, tailored to the specifications of our age: tough, cultivated, secular, sophisticated, bored with the dogmas and ideologies of the marketplace, a man for whom traditional wisdom consists in combining three policies—getting on with those one doesn't agree with, holding what one has, and walking downstairs before one is kicked down. It is sometimes regarded as a sign of greatness in a thinker that he can be endlessly travestied: if this is so, then Burke is certainly in Elysium. A few months ago the conservative writer mentioned above, T. E. Utley, described Burke as "a house with many mansions": on recent evidence it would have been both truer and newer to call him "a front to many houses."

Thirdly, conservative skeptics may be divided according to what it is in the doctrines of the Left that they are skeptical about. Of course they are all skeptical about principles, but it is commonly assumed on the Right that principles of two very different kinds enter into, or are presupposed by, liberal or radical views. There are on the one hand theoretical or technical principles, and on the other practical or moral principles: the former provide the 'scientific' basis of reformism, the latter the 'utopian' basis. And both are equally necessary for a rational, full-fledged, self-contained radical program. The radical, that is to say, needs certain practical principles concerning what society ought to be, in order to know what to aim at, and also certain theoretical principles concerning what society really is, in order to realize his aim. I do not wish for the moment to quarrel with these right-wing assumptions—though I certainly do think that the role of principles and presupposition in left-wing thought has been much exaggerated, even by thinkers ultimately well-disposed to the Left, like Isaiah Berlin. Here I only want to point out what we might reasonably expect to find in consequence of them: namely, that right-wing thinkers would always make it quite clear which of these two kinds of liberal assumptions they are attacking. Yet I do not know that we always do.

Of generalized, or secular, skepticism, as we may call it, the

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most notable and influential representative is undoubtedly Professor Michael Oakeshott, the present occupant of the Chair of Political Science at the London School of Economics and thus the direct successor of Graham Wallas and Harold Laski. Oakeshott, who taught at Cambridge before his move to London, has a well-deserved reputation as a stimulating and persuasive lecturer, and is also a writer, albeit a meager one, of a very individual kind, with a style intriguingly compounded of Arnold, F. H. Bradley, and Henry James. Originally himself an Idealist by conviction, he has graduated into a kind of philosophical detachment which regards all sincere and disinterested thought as valid and all criticism as crude impertinence. As a thinker, as a writer, as a personality, Oakeshott is what it would have been fashionable only a few years ago to call a "mandarin": ironical, pessimistic, uncommitted, scornful of dogmatism and pomposity and harsh abstraction, sensitive to the charms of the complex, the old and the obscure. However, as with many of a similar cast of mind, there is a sort of buried circularity implicit in his thought: so that starting as the enemy of all forms of utilitarianism and crude functionalism, he has ended up in a species of subtle, rarified but unmistakable pragmatism.

Oakeshott's teaching is not easy to define, partly because of an almost Levantine elusiveness of thought and partly because of an extreme scarcity of the written word. The relevant writings are a few articles in the now extinct *Cambridge Journal,* and the inaugural lecture in London entitled "Political Education": from these however—though nothing like a doctrine emerges—a certain body of opinion, a certain outlook on the world can be reconstructed.

The enemy for Oakeshott—and I have already indicated that his thought can best be approached through what it denounces and excludes—is something called Rationalism. Rationalism is a general and widespread malady of the modern age—which means roughly Europe since Galileo—but its worst ravages have (if we except religion) been inflicted in the sphere of politics. Closely linked with the rise of science though in fact embodying a complete misunderstanding of scientific method, it can be characterized by the two cardinal intellectual errors committed by its adherents. In the first place, in any given subject or discipline, the Rationalist admits the existence of only one kind of knowledge whereas in fact there are

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always two. Technical knowledge, the knowledge that can be expressed in rules and formulae, that can be deliberately taught and learned and remembered and "as we say, put into practice" receives the admiration and commands the undivided attention of the Rationalist: whereas practical knowledge, the knowledge that exists only in action and is the heir of tradition, is not merely underrated or ignored by him but has its existence denied, is counted as mere nescience. The Rationalist takes up this attitude in the first place because he is "the man of the book,"—the man who believes that what can't go into words and propositions is nothing and technique is by definition that which is verbalizable; and secondly, because he is in quest of certainty, and technique being something that can be written down in a self-contained, self-explanatory form, holds out hope of indubitability. But—and here we come up against the Rationalist's second characteristic error—not merely does he hold technique in ludicrously high esteem, but he does not correctly understand the nature of that which he admires so inordinately. For technique can never be the independent, self-sufficing phenomenon that he thinks it is. Everything that we learn, we learn on the basis of what we know already: all education is a move from *comparative* ignorance to *comparative* knowledge. If this is so, then even the most seemingly autonomous technique depends upon, and is nourished by, beliefs and hypotheses, fragments of acquired or inherited knowledge, that lie outside itself. And so the ideal of certainty, which depends for its satisfaction on the possibility of imprinting upon the *tabula rasa* of the mind an isolated independent body of doctrine, must remain unrealized.

Now it might seem from this résumé of Oakeshott's critical doctrine that, on account of the reference it contains to a higher kind of knowledge, it can only improperly be regarded as an instance of the Argument from Ignorance. But a closer examination of this superior knowledge—particularly as described in "Political Education" —will show such suspicions to be unfounded. For, in the first place, practical knowledge is not, in the ordinary, doctrinal or theoretical sense of the word, 'knowledge' at all: that is to say, it does not and in its very nature cannot issue in a set of verbalizable beliefs and opinions. It expresses itself in and only in practice. It is like a craft or skill that cannot be taught, only imparted, and that is handed

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down from parent to child and perhaps only in the second or third generation achieves fruition, and only then, at the moment and place of this late flowering, is it really *there*. Oakeshott indeed reserves some of his finest irony for those blundering traditionalists and conservatives who would fight the Rationalist with his own blunt weapons and desperately try to develop an ideology of tradition, a technique of conservatism—as though they can't see that such things are contradictions in terms. Secondly, practical knowledge is always particular. There is no general skill we can learn that will serve us as well in this country as in that, in one age as in another. To be wise in politics is, roughly, to be able to do the right kind of thing in one's own country in one's own age: it is an acquisition of 'municipal,' not 'universal,' validity, and it is not therefore surprising that the only way of acquiring it is through that most particular of all studies, History. Thirdly, practical knowledge is in its essence non-teleological: it eschews all conceptions of end or perfection, and so could not possibly provide us with any final or static vision of society by reference to which radical visions can be judged and found wanting. Practical knowledge equips us to deal with the particular problems and particular disharmonies of our particular society, but it contains no method, not even potentially, for arriving at an ultimate solution or for producing eternal harmony—if, that is, it even allows us to attach significance to such expressions. In other words, the correct form of any political question and the only form in which it admits of an answer, is, Where do we go from here?: never, Whither are we bound?

One very effective device in Oakeshott's style of arguing—something that couldn't altogether be kept out even of this very jejune summary—is the way he introduces the note of personality, the typological issue, into the most abstract argument. So for instance he doesn't say "According to Rationalism . . ." or "A further implication of Rationalism is . . ." but prefers "The Rationalist would say . . ." or "The Rationalist would go on to claim . . .," and so gives one the feeling that he is fighting not with a certain body of doctrine but with a certain kind of person, i.e. the kind of person who would take to the doctrine in question like a duck to water. Now, it seems to me that in the nature of things the typical upholder of any doctrine is always bound to be less attractive than that doctrine

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itself: and so, if the doctrine itself is unattractive, its typical representative is a sitting duck. But to shoot him is no kind of sport. For in the first place, in politics we seek primarily truth, not charm or glamour. And secondly, if our political views are charmless, then, in some ways, so much the better. For this will bring home to us a fact of great importance and one which otherwise we might easily lose sight of: that the correct place for the satisfaction of the sentiments is outside, not inside, politics. It is undoubtedly useful that there should, in periods when there is much to be done, be people who feel and think like the Webbs: but it seems to me both more human and more desirable to approach things in the spirit of Keynes:

> Chiefly do not let us overestimate the importance of the economic problem or sacrifice to its supposed necessities other matters of greater or more permanent significance. It should be a matter for specialists—like dentistry. If economists could manage to get themselves thought of as humble, competent people, on a level with dentists, that would be splendid.

For "economic" and "economists," read the more general words, "political" and "politicians," and you have the central liberal or radical attitude to the managing of the affairs of many people in big communities. Indeed one way of meeting Oakeshott's dialectic would be to point out (perhaps rather priggishly) that the Rationalist can be distinguished from the Traditionalist as one who expects far more from politics in the way of universal happiness but far less in the way of personal satisfaction.

Ultimately the appeal of Oakeshott is to that strain of tired romantic realism which is such a significant constituent of the English mind. (Particularly, it must be added, of the English upper-class mind. Would it not be an agreeable stroke of irony if Oakeshott, who is such a scornful critic of all attempts to better oneself "by the book," who has diagnosed Rationalism as the attempt to fit out a parvenu class with ready-made political wisdom, who can find no better image to convey his idea of vulgarity and ineptitude than that of a shopkeeper who, having bought an estate, takes a correspondence course in estate management to control it and its tenantry, should find his vocation in providing members of the new and aspiring classes with a *vade-mecum,* of a subtlety and efficacy just not to be

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had from minds like that of Professor Kirk, for assimilating themselves into the ranks of the old and the established, that he should become, on the most elevated possible level, the Emily Post of political life?) What Oakeshott seems to be saying is "Now after all this cant and braying, after all the ideologies and the neologisms, after all the big words and the big talk and the little learning to be got out of it all, now let's turn to politics and look at them as for better or for worse they really are." And the real trouble with Oakeshott is, it seems to me, that judged by the very standards to which he appeals, he is just wrong. It might be that politics ought to be what he says they are, it might even be to the credit of human nature if they were. But they aren't. Human beings in politics think in abstract terms and regard problems as capable of solution: they have visions of society, and they devise policies and project revolutions to realize them. They start, it is true, from inherited beliefs but often enough only to criticize and reject them: as for their traditional peculiarities, they find them useful enough for jokes and for tourism but (save in a few countries which are no model for civilized life) they do not live by them. What they live by, what they are prepared to suffer for, what they will even die for, are just those abstractions and dogmas and ideologies which Oakeshott despises. Of course Oakeshott is not unaware of all this, and he accepts it—as he'd damn well better. But he accepts it much as Margaret Fuller, I am sure, accepted the universe: face-savingly. And having once accepted it he has his own way of dealing with it. The desire for universality, for rationality, for which there is so much evidence throughout all the particular histories of political mankind, goes for him into *oratio obliqua* rather than *oratio recta.* Every revolt against tradition and particularity in any country becomes, once it has really arrived, part of the tradition and the particularity of that country: it is from then onward just another item that the wise statesman must consult and explore in his pursuit of 'intimations': what it never is, because it is never allowed to be, is an effective argument against this whole narrow parochial anti-rationalistic conception or style of politics. The final stage in this kind of reasoning, one that Oakeshott like all true traditionalists embraces with a certain kind of perverse fervor, is the paradox that all past revolutions are right, and all projected revolutions are wrong. And here is one of those rare occasions in politics

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when we feel that we have reached the bounds of dispute, and beyond is silence. For to some this conclusion seems the ultimate distillation of wisdom: to others the apotheosis of silliness. And that is that.

As I have already said, skepticism of this generalized variety does not possess a monopoly of skepticism in politics, even on the Right. It shares the field with another kind of skepticism that is narrowly political in essence. Skepticism of this second kind is of course nothing new. There is in the Christian tradition a long line of thinking that is so fiercely engrossed in, and consumed with, the eternal verities in all their absoluteness and certainty, that it finds all attempts to apply them and interpret them in the sphere of ordinary day-to-day happenings crude and unreliable: the very ideal or model of certainty that is gained in acquaintance with the teachings of religion has ultimately an unsettling effect on the judgment because we cannot but at all times be aware of the extent to which our everyday secular verdicts fall short of it. Today this train of thinking has found new and original expression in the writings and teachings of Herbert Butterfield, Professor of Modern History in the University of Cambridge.

Butterfield's place in the esteem of the young is not really very difficult to account for. In the first place, he is a historian: and in England today, history is a subject that enjoys immense prestige—as perhaps in all countries where imaginative literature is in eclipse. Nowadays we look to historians for belief, for entertainment and for enlightenment: they provide the theories, the illusions, the superstitions, and the controversies of the age. Secondly, Butterfield is a very distinguished historian. And this also is important: for it cannot have escaped the notice of ai v clever young man that the various experts of one kind or another who ordinarily presume to address him on politics are not those who have won the right to do so by success in their own field but rather those who hope that politics will turn out to be an easier field for success than that of their original choice. Thirdly, Butterfield is a very eccentric historian. For in the recent past English historians have tended to fall into two broad categories: those with faith who write in faith and those without faith who write outside faith. Butterfield cuts across this distinction and moreover believes it to be the supreme duty of the historian to cut across it, by being with faith and writing outside it.

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The main object of Butterfield's criticism is what he calls "Whig history": the word "Whig" being used as an instance of what grammarians call "synecdoche," i.e. the part standing for the whole. What he is in effect against is any history which presumes to treat its subject matter in moral terms, which would detect in the course of events the work of divine providence, and he takes as supreme example of this kind of error and presumption the Whig historians who saw the Civil War as a divine judgment on an unrighteous dynasty. In contrast to this Butterfield urges the claim of "technical history," history which tries as far as is possible to eliminate the element of appraisal and censure and subjectivity. And if Butterfield, living a hundred years later, knows well enough that Ranke's maxim of recounting things *wie es eigentlich gewesen* is for one reason or another ultimately unobtainable, he sees this not as a reason for abandoning it as an ideal but rather as an extra reason for pursuing it with unrelenting pertinacity: if we can achieve so little, all the more reason for trying harder.

Butterfield's arguments against the introduction of moral judgments into the writing of history are basically three in number. In the first place, there is the fact of original sin, the dead weight of innate evil in comparison with which the differences in moral achievement between this and that human being are as nothing. If there is a moral lesson that history teaches, it is a lesson of such pervasiveness, of such generality as to be supremely dissatisfying to those with a taste for that kind of thing: namely, "that all men are, and always have been, sinners." There is fundamentally no point in trying to divide the sheep from the goats, because all belong to the same pen. If however we concede this point and admit that the historian can do no more than grade the goats, urging that they can at least do this much, then we come up against Butterfield's second argument: namely, that the task is too difficult for human powers. As human beings, we live externally one to another, seeing only the outer husk of behavior, and, from this particular vantage point, to try and determine in the case of another's action, first of all, the determining factors that would acquit him of responsibility and, secondly, the extenuating factors that would diminish his responsibility—as we must before passing a true moral judgment—is virtually and practically *impossible*: "The difference between the wickedness and responsi-

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bility of one man and those of another, in the general world of nature, is so idle a question and so nice a point that it is not worth the wear of our fine intellects to discuss it in any imaginable conjuncture of life or history." And, finally, even if we could arrive at moral judgments, we oughtn't to. For the will to judge springs from a demand for an illegitimate kind of power over others, it leads to the corruption of those who exemplify it, and it makes the understanding of human beings by human beings an ever-receding possibility.

From all of which it emerges that Butterfield's objections to moralistic history derive not from any general antinomianism but, on the contrary, from the high esteem in which he holds the moral element in life and the consequent concern that nothing should be allowed to degrade it. The only moral judgments that a fallible human being is justified in making are either general principles about the rightness or wrongness of certain kinds of acts or particular verdicts on actual actions but when and only when the actions are his: "Moral judgments of actual people cannot defensibly or usefully exist in concrete cases save in the form of self-judgments." The background to all this doubt and skepticism and uncertainty on one level is unswerving faith on a higher level. There is a place where moral judgments of an authoritative and unambiguous and unqualified kind can be made, but just because that place is not the earth on which we live we must practice restraint and humility, we must not presume to a power and insight that isn't ours. "The kind of ethical judgment," Butterfield writes, and this is perhaps his last word on the subject—"which historians like Acton have been so anxious to achieve is possible only to God."

Now what, it might be asked, has any of this to do with politics and right-wing politics in particular? At the outset it must be admitted that the connection is not direct. In the first place, I have no reason at all to think that Butterfield himself is a man of the Right: I do not know what political views he holds, and would not be seriously surprised to learn that he voted Labour in every election. Moreover, he does not himself, in his written works at least, extend his skepticism into the sphere of politics: it is confined by him to the writing of history and to the conduct of diplomacy. My point, however, is that it could, without any very great difficulty, be ex-

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tended by others to the theory of politics, and that if this were done, it is fairly clear in which particular political direction it would lead. It is of course possible for people to defend the status quo with the same moral fervor as others defend reform—that is undeniable: if however one is deliberately without moral fervor, if one practices what Butterfield in another context calls "self-emptying," then it is extremely unlikely that one will be on the side of reform—for where is one to find the justification for all the turmoil and upheaval and suffering that no reformist program can ever entirely dispense with? Historically it is a fact that "the politics of fallen creation" have not been the politics of change: on the contrary they have favored conservation and preached the virtue of reconciling oneself to one's lot. Again, the 'purist' conception of morals that we find in Butterfield, according to which morality is degraded by, rather than designed for, application to concrete cases, is bound to inhibit those with broad—or even those with less broad—visions of society in their considered efforts to realize these visions. There is of course in the last resort no direct connection between the particular epistemology or morals to which one subscribes and the particular moral views one holds. So much logical theory tells us. And the lesson is important. It should not however lead us to forget the complementary and no less important lesson that common sense has for us: namely, that there is a great deal in the way of indirect connection between the two. Offhand I would think it very improbable—and facts confirm this *a priori* estimate—that anyone who holds a skeptical theory of moral knowledge would also hold any very bold or revolutionary moral principles.

Little has been proved. The subtle and elusive teachings of two professors—one of them not known to be a conservative, and neither of them even a television personality—scarcely constitute in themselves a movement of ideas. Moreover, as is well known, though it is just possible that revolution might be the work of ideas, it is inconceivable that counterrevolution could be. (Witness the intense animosity of the Conservative party to ideas. Not that the Conservative party is dedicated to counter-revolution: it is interested in something even more 'un-ideological' than reaction, i.e. conservation. And the first principle of conservation, as any housewife knows, is to try

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to conserve only those things that 'keep': which ideas notoriously don't.)

The question then arises, Are there any other features of English life which provide a suitable setting for these subtle ideas, which might serve as the hard ground on which these seeds could fall and thrive? I believe that there are certain things in Britain which can be seen in this light. In the first place, there is the withdrawal from politics that has been so much in evidence since 1949 or thereabouts: a movement attributable in part to disillusion with the ideologies of an older generation, in part to satisfaction with the reforms of the recent past. And whereas immediately after the war to be unpolitical was to be on the Left, i.e. to hope vaguely that someone else would do something, to be unpolitical four or five years later was to be on the Right, i.e. to feel vaguely that no one should do anything more. In some quarters the movement has gone further and become, in a very peculiar and inverted way, anti-political. There are a certain number of people, mostly intellectuals or near-intellectuals, who feel that they ought to be interested in politics and because they aren't, feel resentment against politics: in particular, knowing that if they were interested in politics they would be on the Left, they feel a special resentment against the Left. This kind of political *beylisme* leads by a natural logic to fanatical admiration for, and envy of, all these strong burly masculine figures to whom in an earlier and simpler age political passion, activity and consummation came so easily: in this way the '30s and the period of the Spanish War have acquired a prestige like that of some pristine Eden from which political cynicism has expelled us. A much-publicized example of this sort of sentiment, though stopping short of the final 'anti-Left' stage, is Kingsley Amis's curious pamphlet after Suez, *Socialism and the Intellectuals.*

Secondly, there has in some of the higher reaches of British life been a move toward respectability. In Great Britain for a certain number of years now, for better or worse, the cause of progressive ideas has been materially at any rate dependent on, and bound up with, the existence of a fairly large though amorphous class, economically secure and in all ways well-connected, stretching roughly from the intelligentsia on the Left to café society on the Right. It is a class that escapes at once the anxieties of power and the responsi-

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bilities of status. Satirized by Huxley, loathed by Lawrence, it has continued, in a pleasure-loving frivolous patronizing fashion, to toss food to the mouth that bites it. Often enough its contribution to the cause of progressive ideas has gone deeper than this. Though in no marked way connected with radical political ideas, it is supremely the class that indulges in what Mill called "experiments in living": without ever standing in the way of those who would appeal to tradition, it has done its best to erode tradition itself. Now there are certain signs indicating the disappearance of this class: or rather its re-assimilation into the respectable classes to which it owes its social origins. The main cause of this is presumably economic: the impact of taxation and other redistributive measures. The most obvious sign of it is the formal clothes that after a period of fashionable untidiness in dress have of recent years become the uniform of the rich and young. (But what, it might be asked, has the revival of bowler hats and stiff collars to do with left-wing versus right-wing ideas in politics? The answer to this question is to be found in that distinctive feature of English life: the vast, loosely-knit, confederate empire of Fashion of which politics, literature, art, clothes, speech, ideas, are, in their different ways, on their different terms, the various tribute-paying members.) Whether ultimately the disaffection of this class will mean much, whether its place will not be taken by a New Bohemia, are at this present point unanswerable questions.

Thirdly, there is the new prestige attached to ambition: the very word being for thirty years or so out of fashion. To see the change of sentiment on this score, the best method, as so often in such matters, is to look at the serious imaginative literature of the period. Compare the heroes of Virginia Woolf or Aldous Huxley or Forster with those of Angus Wilson or Wain or Amis. Differences abound, of course, but one of the most interesting is a new kind of innocence that the writer seems to have found in ambition. It is as if he were telling us that compared with the endless probing into fruitless sentiments or the egotistical pursuit of dry and lifeless slogans—the favorite pastimes of earlier heroes—getting on in the world, looking after oneself, are pretty harmless occupations. I do not want to suggest that this is as such a right-wing phenomenon. On the contrary, the writers I have referred to are all on the Left. And again it would not, I think, be fanciful to correlate this change of sentiment about ambi-

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tion with the social reforms that have taken place since the war and which allow men *de bonne volonté* to feel that it is no longer true that all getting on is getting on at someone else's expense. Yet, when all these reservations and qualifications have been made, the fact is that the new hero of today's literature is, potentially at any rate, an *homme de droite*: by which I mean someone who subscribes to right-wing views not because they are his by tradition and upbringing, not because they coincide with his interests, not because they seem to him to be true and all others false, but because, better than any others, they fit in with and they form part of his vision of life. And I would not be surprised if a generation brought up to accept him tended also to accept his views. For as the Romantic movement showed, in the cult of literature there is great efficacy in the maxim, Love me, love my dog.

Is there then a revival of conservatism in England today? There are certain things that point toward it; they do not prove it, though; and there are many other things that point away from it. Moreover in England things can change very quickly. Culturally the country has the geography of a broad, sandy estuary through which a river works its tortuous way to the sea down a number of different channels. To map it is the difficulty. For it requires only a shift in the wind that blows across it, only a change in what the river brings down from the mountains, for the course of the channels and the configuration of sandbank and strand to change, overnight, beyond recognition. Just where one thought firm land was emerging, there is, next day, rushing water; and far off, in an unexpected place, new sand boils up.

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## Marcel Proust

# SAINTE-BEUVE AND BALZAC*

One of the writers of his day that Sainte-Beuve was wrong about is Balzac. You look down your nose. You don't care for him, I know. And there you have some right on your side. The vulgarity of his mind was so massive that a lifetime could not leaven it. It was not only that when he was no older than was Rastignac at the outset of his career he set before him as his goal in life the gratification of the most groveling ambitions—or at least, confused these ambitions so thoroughly with other and better ones that it is almost impossible to disentangle them; but in the year before his death, when the fulfilment of the love of his life, the marriage to Mme. Hanska whom he had loved for sixteen years, was in sight, he writes to his sister like this:

Say what you like, Laure, in Paris it means something to be able, when one wants to, to throw open one's house and entertain the cream of society, who will meet there a woman who is polished, stately as a queen, of high descent, related to the grandest families, witty, well-educated and handsome. That's a great step toward becoming a power in the land. I can't help it, this business that's going on, quite apart from my feelings (failure would as good as kill me), means all or nothing to me, double or quits. Heart, soul, ambition, everything about me is set on just this one thing that I've been in pursuit of for the last sixteen years: if this stupendous happiness slips through my fingers, there's nothing else I want. Don't suppose that I love luxury. It's the luxury of the Rue Fortunée that I love, and all that goes with it: a beautiful woman, well-born, comfortably off, and knowing all the best people.

Elsewhere he again speaks of Mme. Hanska in like terms: "This

* From *On Art and Literature: 1896-1919,* a volume of Proust's criticism, soon to be published by Meridian Books.

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person who brings with her (apart from her money) inestimable social advantages." After this, one can't feel surprised that Mme. de Mortsauf in *Le Lys dans la Vallée,* his superlative ideal woman, his "angel," writing from her deathbed to Félix de Vandenesse, whom she loves both amorously and maternally, a letter so enshrined in his memory that years later he will say of it: *"This was the heavenly voice that suddenly spoke out of the silence of night, this was the sublime figure that arose to show me the true path,"* should give him good advice as to how to get on in the world. To get on in the world virtuously and in a Christian spirit; for Balzac knew he ought to paint a saintly figure, but he could not conceive how social success should not be the goal of all goals, even in the eyes of a saint. And when he enlarges to his sister and his nieces on the benefits to be drawn from close acquaintance with such a wonderful being as the woman he loved, that *summum bonum* she might impart to them is to be found in a particular aristocratic deportment that knows how to indicate and preserve the distinctions due to age, rank, etc., with some theater tickets thrown in: "a box at the *Italiens,* and the *Opéra,* and the *Opéra-Comique.*" And Rastignac, when he falls in love with his aunt, Mme. de Beauséant, confides in her quite seriously, "You could do a lot for me." Mme. de Beauséant shows no surprise at this, and smiles.

I say nothing of the vulgarity of his language. It was so inherent that it even contaminated his verbal resources and made him use expressions that would jar in the most careless conversation. *Quinola's Expedients* he first intended to call *Quinola's Dodges.* "His hair stood up on end" is how he paints d'Arthez's astonishment. To a worldly-wise reader these expressions sometimes seem primed with deep social observation: "Vandenesse's earlier loves, Mme. d'Espard, Mme. de Manerville, Lady Dudley and others of less note, felt serpents stirring in the depths of their hearts; they envied Félix's happiness; gladly would they have given *their prettiest slippers* to see some misfortune befall him." And whenever he tries to hide this vulgarity, he develops a vulgarian's refinement, like those mawkish attitudes, those fingers affectedly propping the brow, which frightful stock-jobbers put on when they go for carriage rides in the Bois. So he says, "Dear lady," or rather, *"cara," "addio"* for good-by, etc.

You have sometimes thought Flaubert vulgar in the light of some of his collected letters. But at least there is no vulgarity in

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Flaubert himself, for he understood that the writer's life is centered in his work, and that the remainder only exists "to provide an illusion to describe." Balzac puts the achievements of life and of literature on exactly the same level. "If the *Comédie Humaine* does not make a great man of me," he writes to his sister, "this achievement will" (the achievement of his marriage to Mme. Hanska).[1]

But if you come to think of it, the verisimilitude of some of his pictures may be due to that same vulgarity. Even in those of us whom high-mindedness specifically impels to reject vulgar motives, to condemn and disinfect them, those motives may exist, fundamental though transfigured. In any case, though an ambitiously-minded man should feel an ideal love—even though his ambitious thoughts may not be transfigured by it—that love, alas! is not the whole of his life and often is no more than the few best days of his youth. It is with that part of himself alone that a writer composes his book; but there is a whole part which is left out. And so what force of truth we acknowledge when we see Vandenesse or Rastignac impulsively falling in love, knowing that Vandenesse and Rastignac are cold-hearted climbers whose whole lives have been ambition and scheming; and again when these youthful romances of theirs (yes, almost more their romances than Balzac's) are forgotten things which they only refer to with smiles, with the smiles of those who have really forgotten, and the love affair with Mme. de Mortsauf is discussed by third parties, or even by the hero himself, just as if it were any other adventure, and without even a sense of grief that its remembrance should not have filled their whole lives. To reach such a degree of truth to life—life as the worldly and the experienced know it, where it is agreed that love is fleeting, a youthful vagary, that ambition and lust have more than a hand in it, that one day all that kind of thing won't seem very important, etc.—to show that the most romantic feelings may be no more than a play of refracted light transfiguringly directed on his ambitions by the ambitious man himself and to show this, consciously or unconsciously, in the most compelling way, that is by showing objectively as the bleakest of adventurers

1 But are we slightly surfeited with truth as conceived by Flaubert, Mallarmé, etc., and beginning to crave the infinitesimal amount of truth that may lie in the antithetical falsehood (like someone who will need salt after a long and beneficial "salt-free" treatment, like those savages who feel "sick-mouthed," and, so M. Paul Adam tells us, fall on other savages in order to consume the salt in their skin)?

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the man who himself, subjectively, sees himself in his own eyes as a romantic wooer; this, perhaps, was a privilege granted in return for, or even conditional on, the author's precisely and quite naturally conceiving the noblest feelings in such a vulgar way that when he supposed he was describing the fulfilment of a life-long dream of happiness he actually told us about the social advantages of that marriage. Here there is no call to differentiate between his letters and his novels. If it has often been said that his characters were real people to him, and that he seriously debated if so-and-so were a better match for Mlle. de Grandlieu, or for Eugénie Grandet, one can say that his life was a novel which he set about in exactly the same spirit. There was no dividing line between real life (which as you and I think, is not real) and the life in his novels (which for the writer is the only true life). In the letters to his sister where he talks about the possibilities of this marriage to Mme. Hanska, not only is everything built up like a novel, but those involved are placed, analyzed, described, seen as factors in the development of the plot, as if in one of his books. Wishing to impress on her how his mother writes to him as if he were a little boy, and how the disclosure not only of his debts but of the family insolvency might bring the marriage to nothing and incline Mme. Hanska toward another suitor, he writes exactly as he might write in *Le Curé de Tours*:

> The dismayed sculptor says to himself, Why the devil did my mother write to me, why the devil must my sister in Calcutta write to me about the fix she was in! Why didn't my brother keep quiet? See where this has got us to! I had the chance of a marriage that would have made a rich man of me, and best of all, a happy man. Everything's gone to wrack and ruin for a lot of nonsense.

Just as his sister, his brother-in-law, his mother[2] (the mother for whom, much as he adores her, he feels none of that touching humility of those great men who always remain children where their mother is concerned and forget, as she does, that they are geniuses) interest us as characters in that novel of his life: *Un Grand Mariage,*

2 He said: "the mother of a man like me," and when he speaks of how fond he is of her, how humble before her, it is the same as when he depicts the ideal angelic nature of Mme. de Mortsauf; he embosses and glorifies and overloads that ideal but the mean alloy is still there; his ideal woman is none the less a woman who enjoyed having her shoulders kissed by a strange man, who understood and could teach how to get on in the world. His angels are Rubens angels, winged, and showing a great deal of bosom.

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so, in the same way, his pictures—whether those in his collection or those he saw at Wierschownia, most of which were to go to the Rue Fortunée—are "characters in fiction" too. Each of them calls forth those historical disquisitions, those picture-lover's reviews, that admiration that turns quickly into illusion, exactly as if they hang not on Balzac's walls but in the collections of Pons, or of Claës, or in the Abbé Chapeloud's modest library, in those novels of his where there are pictures on the footing of people, and where the slightest Coypel "would not disfigure the finest collection"; just as Bianchon is the equal of Cuvier, of Lamarck, of Geoffroy de Saint-Hilaire. And he does not describe the furniture of Cousin Pons or of Claës with more affection, more realism, more illusion, than he describes his pictures in the Rue Fortunée or those at Wierschownia. "I have received the table-cistern that Bernard Palissy made for Henry II or Charles IX. It is one of his best pieces, and one of the rarest, a priceless specimen, for it has a diameter of fifteen to twenty inches and stands twenty-seven inches high, etc." "The little house in the Rue Fortunée will soon receive some fine pictures, a charming head by Greuze which comes from the collection of the late king of Poland, two Canalettos that once belonged to Pope Clement XIII, two Van Huysums, one Van Dyke, three canvases by Rotari—the Greuze of Italy, a *Judith* by Cranach which is a miracle, etc. These pictures are *di primo cartello,* and would not disfigure the finest collection." Elsewhere he speaks of his chandelier—"from the household goods of some German emperor, because it is surmounted by a two-headed eagle"; of his portrait of Queen Maria Leczinska "which is not a Coypel, but painted in his workshop by an apprentice, possibly Lancret, possibly another; one needs to be a connoisseur not to take it for a Coypel." "A charming Natoire, signed and very authentic, a trifle pretty-pretty, however, against the substantial specimens of painting in my collection." "An *Aurora* of Guido's in his powerful manner, when he was completely Caravaggio. It reminds me of Canaletto, but it is more grandiose. In short, it is incomparable, for me, at least."[3] ". . . a Van Dyke, a Cranach, a Mignard, a Rigaud, every one of them superlative, three Canalettos purchased by the

3 He often said: "for me, at least"; he said of *Cousin Pons*: "It is, for me, at least, one of those fine works. . . ." It must have been his mother who told him: If you talk like that, you should say, for me, at least.

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King, a Van Dyke bought from Van Dyke by Mme. Hanska's great-great-great-grandmother, a Rembrandt—what pictures! The Countess wishes the three Canalettos to go to my collection. There are two Van Huysums whose value could not be met though one covered them with diamonds. What treasures there are in these great Polish families!"

Because of this half-baked realism, too fabulous for life, too prosaic for literature, we often get very much the same kind of pleasure from Balzac's books that we get from life. It is not mere legerdemain when Balzac, wanting a list of eminent doctors or eminent artists, hodgepodges the names of real men with those of characters in his books, saying: "He had the genius of a Claude Bernard, a Bichat, a Desplein, a Bianchon," as panorama painters mingle figures in actual relief with painted urns and melons in their foregrounds. Quite often these real persons look none the more real for it. The livingness of his characters is due to Balzac's art, but the satisfaction this affords him is non-artistic. He speaks about them as though they were real people, and really celebrated: "the distinguished late Minister de Marsay, the only great statesman produced by the July Revolution, the only man who could have saved France" —now with the bland conceit of a parvenu who, not content with owning fine pictures, must continually be proclaiming the name of the artist and the price he had been offered for the picture, now with the artlessness of a child who having christened its dolls thinks they have really come alive. He carries this to the point of calling them, all of a sudden, and when so far not much has been said of them, by their Christian names; be it Princesse de Cadignan ("Diane did not look twenty-five"), Mme. de Sérizy ("No one could have followed Léontine; she flew"), or Mme. du Bartas (" 'Biblical?' replied Fifine, astonished"). We see this familiarity as slightly vulgar but quite without that snobbery which made Mme. de Nucingen refer to Mlle. de Grandlieu as Clothilde—"to give herself the quality," as Balzac says, "of being on terms of Christian names with her, as if she, born a Goriot, frequented that society."

Sainte-Beuve blames Balzac for having magnified the Abbé Troubert, who finally becomes a sort of Richelieu, etc. Balzac did the same thing with Vautrin and many others. This is not merely a

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way of adding splendor and stature to these characters and presenting them as the finest of their kind—as Bianchon and Desplein are peers of Claude Bernard and Laënnec, and M. de Grandville of d'Agues-seau: it is also the fault of one of Balzac's most cherished theories, the theory of the great man to whom greatness of circumstances has been denied, and because his real objective as a novelist is precisely that: to be the historian of the unhistoried, and to study certain characters of historic dimensions just as they manifest themselves while lacking the historical factor which would impel them to great-ness. As long as this is how Balzac sees them, it does not disconcert us; but when Lucien de Rubempré, on the point of killing himself, writes to Vautrin, "If God wills it so, these mysterious beings are Moses, Attila, Charlemagne, Mahomet or Napoleon. But if he leaves these gigantic instruments to rust beneath the ocean of a generation they are no more than Pougatcheff, Fouché, Louvel, or the Abbé Carlos Herrera. Farewell, then, farewell to you, who on the right path could have been more than a Ximenes, more than a Richelieu, etc.," Lucien talks too much like Balzac, and leaves off being a real person, distinguishable from all others. And in spite of the amazing variety of Balzac's characters, and their amazing degree of personal identity, this, for one reason or another, sometimes happens.

We recognize Balzac in such passages, and we smile, not un-kindly; but because he can be recognized, all the details that were intended to make the characters of his novels more like people in real life, have the opposite effect. The character lived; Balzac so plumes himself on it that he mentions, quite needlessly, the sum of her dowry, and her connections with other characters in *La Comédie Humaine,* who are thus put on the footing of living people—which seems to him to be killing two birds with one stone. "Mme. de Sérizy (though born a de Ronquerolles) was not on their visiting list." But because one sees Balzac's legerdemain one loses a little of one's faith in the reality of those Grandlieus who did not invite Mme. de Sérizy to their house. Though the impression made by the trickster's, or the artist's, vitality is deepened, it is at the expense of the impression made by the vitality of the work of art. A work of art, for all that; and though it is a trifle eked out with all these overconvincing de-tails, all this Musée Grévin business, they too are fuel to its fire, and something is made of them. And as all this relates to an epoch,

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records its outward habiliments and judges very acutely on what lies beneath, when its interest as a novel is exhausted, it begins a new life as a historical document. As the *Aeneid,* just where poets find it boring, can be enthralling to mythologists, so when Peyrade, Félix de Vandenesse, and the like, don't seem to us to have much life in them, Albert Sorel tells us that it is in them we must study the police system of the Consulate or the politics of the Bourbon Restoration. The novel is itself a gainer by this. As with those people whom one makes friends with on a holiday and is about to take leave of when one learns that they are catching the same train and may be re-met in Paris, so at the depressing moment when we must say good-by to a Balzac character—a moment that Balzac had put off as long as he could by making him reappear in other novels—just when he is about to disappear and be no more than a dream, Sorel says to us: "Not at all. This isn't a dream. Study them, it's authentic, it's part of history."

So in reading Balzac we can still feel and almost gratify those cravings which great literature ought to allay in us. With Tolstoy, the account of an evening party in high society is dominated by the mind of the author, and, as Aristotle would say, we are purged of our worldliness while we read it; with Balzac, we feel almost a worldly satisfaction at taking part in it. His very titles carry the stamp of actuality. While with many writers the title is more or less of a symbol, an emblem that must be understood in a wider and more poetical sense than a reading of the book would warrant, with Balzac it is more apt to be the other way about. To read through that wonderful book called *Les Illusions Perdues,* clips the wings, rather than not, of that lovely title, *Lost Illusions,* and brings it to earth. The title means that on going to Paris Lucien de Rubempré discovered that Mme. de Bargeton was absurd and provincial, that journalists were rascals, that life was hard. They are quite personal, quite arbitrary illusions, and the loss of them can drive him to despair, while the nature of them gives the book a powerful stamp of reality, but they slightly abate the transcendentalism of the title. So each title should be taken literally: *Un Grand Homme de Province à Paris, Splendeurs et Misères des Courtisanes, A Combien l'Amour Revient aux Vieillards,* etc. In *La Recherche de l'Absolu,* the absolute has more the nature of a formula, an alchemical rather than a

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philosophic affair. Not much is made of it, anyhow. And the story is much more concerned with the havoc a ruling passion can wreak on an affectionate family that must put up with it, whatever the object of that passion may be. Balthasar Claës is brother to Hulot, and to Grandet. Anyone electing to write about a neurasthenic's family will have material for a picture on the same lines.

Style is so largely a record of the transformation imposed on reality by the writer's mind that Balzac's style, properly speaking, does not exist. Here Sainte-Beuve is completely off the scent. "This style which is often titillating and melting, enervated, flushed and streaked with all manner of hues, this delightfully corrupted style, thoroughly Asiatic, as our teachers used to say, and in places more dislocated and more pliable than the limbs of a Greek pantomimist." Nothing could be less accurate. In Flaubert's style, now, all the elements of reality are rendered down into the unanimous substance, into vast, unvaryingly polished surfaces. No flaw remains in it. It has been rubbed to looking-glass smoothness. Everything is shown there, but only in reflection, and without affecting its uniform substance. Everything at variance with it has been made over and absorbed. In Balzac, on the other hand, all the elements of a style which is still to come exist together, undigested and untransformed. It is a style that neither suggests, nor mirrors; it explains. It explains, moreover, by the aid of images which are intensely striking but do not fuse with the rest, and which convey what he wants to say as we convey something in the course of conversation—if we happen to be conversational geniuses—without concerning ourselves as to whether what we say is out of keeping or an interruption. As he will say in a letter: "Good marriages are like cream; a mere nothing will turn them sour," it is by images of this sort—striking, that is, and apt, but discordant, explaining instead of suggesting, and refractory to any considerations of beauty or fitness—that he will get his effects: "M. de Bargeton's laugh which was like damp squibs going off, etc.," "Her complexion had taken on the warm tone of a porcelain vase with a light inside it," "Finally, to describe the man by a stroke whose intelligence will be appreciated by people accustomed to do business, he wore blue spectacles, whose object was to conceal his glance under a pretext of protecting his eyesight from the glare of the light."

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If he is content to hit on a stroke that will make us see what the person is like without attempting to fuse it in a harmonious general effect, in the same way he gives concrete examples, instead of liberating what they may contain. He describes Mme. de Bargeton's state of mind like this: "She imagined the Pasha of Janina, she would have liked to struggle with him in the harem, and thought there was something splendid about being sewn up in a sack and thrown into the Bosporus. She was envious of Lady Hester Stanhope, that bluestocking of the desert." So, not content with evoking the impression he wishes to leave us with, he immediately qualifies it. "His expression was appalling. At that moment, his glance was sublime." He will tell us about Mme. de Bargeton's natural talents which turn into affectations from dwelling on the petty affairs of provincial life; and he adds, as if he were the Comtesse d'Escarbagnas: "In truth, a sunset is a great poem, etc." Even in *Le Lys dans la Vallée,* "one of the most chiseled stones in my edifice," he himself said—and we know that he called it back in proof from the printers as many as seven or eight times—he is in such a hurry to state the facts that the sentence is left to shift for itself. It knew from him what it should tell the reader, for the rest it must manage as best it could: "Although it was so hot I walked down to the meadows to see once again the Indre and its islets, the valley and its hillsides, *of which I appeared a passionate admirer.*"

As he had no conception that literary style is a particular medium where things that are topics for conversation, subjects for study, etc., should not be incorporated in a crude state, he dogs every word with what he thinks of it, and the ideas it calls up in him. If he mentions an artist, he immediately says what he knows about him, as though in a footnote. Speaking of the Séchards' printing press, he says that it was necessary to adapt the paper to the requirements of French civilization, which threatened to extend the right of discussion to every subject and base its existence on a continual manifestation of individual thinking—a real misfortune, since nations which deliberate seldom act, etc. And so he puts in all manner of reflections which because of that natural vulgarity of his are often commonplace, and take on a rather comic quality from being artlessly plumped down in the middle of a sentence; the more so, as terms such as "peculiar to," employed for the specific purpose of defining or elucidating

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something said in parenthesis, give them an added pomposity. In *Le Colonel Chabert,* for instance, there are several references to "the intrepidity natural to attorneys," "the mistrust natural to attorneys." And when he has to supply an explanation, Balzac does not mince matters: he writes, "This is why"; and a chapter follows. Again, there are his recapitulations where, without allowing a moment's breathing space, he tells us everything we ought to know: "From the second month after his marriage, David spent most of his time. . . , etc." "Three months after his arrival in Angoulême, etc."

He hides nothing, he says everything. So one is amazed to find that there are nevertheless wonderful effects of silence in his works. Goncourt marveled at *L'Education.* I marvel even more at the *implications* in Balzac's books. "You know Rastignac? Really? . . ."

Balzac is like those people who on hearing a gentleman say, in speaking of the Duc d'Aumale, *le Prince,* in speaking to a duchess, *Madame la Duchesse,* and on seeing him put his hat on the floor in a drawing-room, have inquired, not then having learned that a prince, whether he is called Comte de Paris, Prince de Joinville, Duc de Chartres, or by other titles, is referred to as *le Prince,* "Why do you say Prince, when he is a Duke? Why do you say, Madame la Duchesse, like a servant? etc." But no sooner do they know that it is customary than they believe they have always known it, or, if they remember their previous cavils, are no less ready to instruct others, and enjoy giving them lessons on the customs of good society, customs they have only just become aware of. Balzac has exactly their peremptory, Mr. Know-all tone of voice when he lays down what is done and what is not done. When d'Arthez is introduced to the Princesse de Cadignan: "The Princess did not pay the great man any of those compliments that common people would have overwhelmed him with. People of good taste, like the Princess, are chiefly to be recognized by the way they listen. At dinner, d'Arthez sat next to the Princess, who, far from the excessive daintiness that fine-lady ladies think proper, etc. etc." Here, at least, the note of assurance is comprehensible, since he is dealing with customs only. But he still retains it when he passes moral judgments: "In society, no one has any feeling for suffering, or misfortune, everything is words." And I must point out that Balzac, like those neo-Christian writers who attribute to the Church a control over authorship that

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the most austerely orthodox popes have never dreamed of, conferred privileges on dukes that Saint-Simon, for all his high opinion of dukedoms, would have been quite dumbfounded to see bestowed on them. "The Duke gave Mme. Camusot one of those swift glances by which the lords of the land can analyze a whole lifetime, and often a soul itself. Oh, if the judge's wife could have known about this ducal gift!" If the dukes of Balzac's day indeed possessed this gift, it must be admitted that things have, as one says, somehow changed.

Balzac does not always directly express that wonderment his slightest remarks inspired in him. He entrusts the expression of it to the characters engaged. There is a very famous story of his called *Autre Etude de Femme*. It is made up of two narratives which do not call for a large cast of walk-on parts; but almost all Balzac's characters are grouped round the narrator, as in the *"à-propos,"* those "command performances" which the Comédie Française puts on for anniversaries or centenaries. Each one chimes in with the appropriate remark, as in those dialogues of the dead, too, in which an author wants to parade a whole epoch. At every minute another of them makes his appearance. De Marsay begins his narrative by explaining that a statesman is a kind of monster of self-possession. "Now you've explained why statesmen are so rare in France," says old Lord Dudley. De Marsay goes on: "This monster became so, thanks to a woman." "I fancied that in politics we were more destructive than constructive," says Mme. de Montcornet, with a smile "If this is to be a love story," says the Baronne de Nucingen, "I beg that it will not be broken into by any moralizings." "Moralizing is so out of place there," exclaims Joseph Bridau. And each on his cue, the Princesse de Cadignan, Lady Barimore, the Marquise d'Espard, Mlle. des Touches, Mme. de Vandenesse, Blondet, Daniel d'Arthez, the Marquis de Montriveau, Count Adam Laginsky, etc., successively speak their lines, as when on Molière's birthday the members of the society file past his statue and lay a palm leaf before it. However, this rather unconvincingly assembled public is exceedingly well-inclined toward Balzac, quite as well-inclined as Balzac himself, whose mouthpiece it is. When de Marsay has uttered the reflection: "True and only love gives rise to a kind of bodily apathy in tune with the contemplative state one sinks into. The mind tangles everything to-

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gether, then sets itself to work, calls up fancies, makes realities and torments of them, and that jealousy which is as sweet as it is painful," a statesman from abroad smiles at recalling in the light of memory the truth of this remark. A little further on de Marsay concludes a description of one of his mistresses by a comparison which is not a very pretty one but it must have pleased Balzac, for we find its fellow in *Les Secrets de la Princesse de Cadignan*: "There is always a first-rate monkey in the prettiest and most angelic of women." At these words, says Balzac, *"all the women cast down their eyes, as if pricked by that cruel truth so cruelly observed."* " 'I will tell you nothing about the night nor the week that I spent,' " de Marsay goes on. " 'I came back to my senses as a statesman.' *At these well-chosen words* we could not refrain from exhibiting our admiration."

Thus Balzac will have us know, down to the least detail, the admiration all these sayings aroused. "That cry of the heart which was echoed among the guests pricked their curiosity, already so skillfully aroused. . . ." "These words everywhere unloosed the stir which journalists in their reports of speeches in parliament describe as *profound sensation.*" Does Balzac want us to construct from that triumph of de Marsay's narratives the triumph that he, Balzac, enjoyed at that evening party at which we were not present? Does he quite simply give way to the admiration that he felt for the lines that flowed from his pen? Perhaps it was a mingling of the two. I have a friend, one of the few authentic geniuses I have known, and endowed with a magnificent Balzacian arrogance. Retailing for my benefit a lecture he had given in a theater at which I had not been present, he interrupted himself from time to time to clap his hands where the public had clapped theirs. But he put so much fervor into it, so much energy, and went on for so long that I really believe that instead of giving me a faithful version of what took place, he was applauding himself.

But this is exactly what Balzac lovers delight in. Smiling, they repeat to themselves: "The ignoble name of Amélie." " 'Biblical?' repeated Fifine, astonished." "The Princesse de Cadignan was one of the ablest women in matters of dress." To love Balzac! Sainte-Beuve, who was so fond of defining what it meant to love someone,

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would have had his work cut out for him here. For with the other novelists, one loves them in submitting oneself to them; one receives the truth from a Tolstoy as from someone of greater scope and stature than oneself. With Balzac, we know all his vulgarities, and at first were often repelled by them; then we began to love him, when we smiled at all those sillinesses which are so typical of him; we love him, with a little dash of irony mixed in our affection; we know his aberrations, his shabby little tricks, and because they are so like him we love them.

Because in some respects Balzac is a slapdash writer, one might suppose that he did not trouble to make his characters talk like themselves, or that if he had tried to, he would not have been able to resist drawing attention to it at every turn. However, it is quite the opposite: the man who artlessly reels out his views on history, art, and so forth, keeps the most deep-laid schemes under cover, and leaves the truth of the dialogue to speak for itself, without attempting to underline what he does so artfully that it might go unnoticed. When he makes the lovely Mme. de Roguin, that born Parisian whom Tours knew as the country prefect's wife, talk about how the Rogrons have furnished their house, how infallibly all those sallies are *hers,* not Balzac's! Lucien de Rubempré has, even in his asides, exactly the animal high spirits, the aroma of raw youth, that Vautrin would be attracted by. " 'Aha!' thought Lucien, 'he plays *bouillote.*' 'I've caught him.' 'What an oriental nature,' Lucien said to himself. 'I'll make him show what he is.' 'This is a lascar who's no more a priest than I am.' " And as it happened, Vautrin was not the only one to love Lucien. Oscar Wilde, whom life, alas, would teach that there are sorrows more piercing than those we get from books, said in his first period (the period of his remark: "Before the Lake poets there were no fogs on the Thames"), "The greatest grief of my life? The death of Lucien de Rubempré in *Splendeurs et Misères des Courtisanes.*" There is besides something particularly dramatic about Oscar Wilde in his most brilliant days having been drawn to Lucien de Rubempré, and moved by his death. No doubt like every reader he grieved over it because he saw it from Vautrin's point of view, which was Balzac's. And it was a point of view, too, which he as a reader was peculiarly fitted and marked out to adopt more wholeheartedly than most readers could. But one can't help thinking how

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a few years later he was himself to be Lucien de Rubempré; and Lucien de Rubempré in the prison of the Conciergerie, seeing all his brilliant worldly career in ruins about him, brought down by the proof that he had been living in close friendship with a convict, was but a foreshadowing—though of course Wilde did not know it at the time—of just what was going to happen to Wilde.

In this last scene of the first part of Balzac's tetralogy (with Balzac, the novel is seldom a whole; the whole consists of a cycle in which the novel is a part),[4] every word, every incident, has an underlying significance that Balzac gives the reader no hint of. These implications arise from such a specialized psychological study, and one which no one, Balzac excepted, has carried out, that it is a delicate task to point them out. But doesn't everything, from the way Vautrin stops Lucien on the road, when he does not know him and so could only be attracted to him by his good looks, to the involuntary gesture with which he takes his arm, doesn't it all betray the very different significance of the theories about very definite domination, about a pact of friendship, etc., by means of which the pretended Canon glozes to Lucien's eyes, and to his own, maybe, an unadmitted thought? And the interpolation of the man who couldn't help eating paper, isn't that, too, admirably indicative of Vautrin's character, and of characters like him—one of their favorite lines of argument, the modicum of their secret that they will let out? But indisputably the finest thing is the marvelous passage where the two travelers pass the tumble-down manor house where Rastignac was born. I call that the *Tristesse d'Olympio* of homosexual love: "He would revisit all—the pool beside the spring."

We know from *Le Père Goriot* that Vautrin at the Pension Vauquer had entertained—though to no purpose—the same designs for dominating Rastignac as he now entertains about Lucien. It came to nothing, but Rastignac had been none the less deeply involved in Vautrin's life. It was so that Rastignac might marry Victorine that Vautrin contrived the murder of young Taillefer. Later on, when Rastignac turns against Lucien, Vautrin, wearing a mask, will re-

4 Make plain Balzac's slow approach (*La Fille aux Yeux d'or, Sarrazine, La Duchesse de Langeais,* etc.), the noose gradually tightening on the subject, then the devastating stranglehold at the end. And also the interpolation of *passages of time,* like geological formations where lava from different epochs lies intermingled (*La Duchesse de Langeais, Sarrazine*).

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mind him about certain doings at the Pension Vauquer and compel him to protect Lucien, and even after Lucien's death Rastignac will often summon Vautrin into a dark street.

Such effects would scarcely be possible if it were not for Balzac's masterly invention of retaining the same characters throughout his novels. And so a ray of light, emerging from the depth of the whole sequence and bridging a lifetime, can come to cast its turbid melancholy gleam on that little manor house in the Dordogne and the two travelers who halt there. Sainte-Beuve completely failed to understand this business of retaining names and characters: "This affectation finally led him to take up a theory that could scarcely have been falser or more thwarting to what makes a book interesting; I mean the way he continually re-introduces his characters from one novel to another, like actors with walk-on parts. Nothing is more damaging to the piquancy which depends on novelty nor to that charm of the unexpected which gives a novel its appeal. Wherever one turns, one encounters the same faces." It is Balzac's stroke of genius that Sainte-Beuve here fails to understand. It can be said, of course, that Balzac did not hit on it immediately. Some portions of his great sequences were not linked up by this means till afterwards. What does that matter? Wagner had composed the "Good Friday Spell" before he thought of writing *Parsifal,* and put it into the opera later on. But the additions Balzac made, these lovely things that are brought in, the new relationships suddenly perceived by his genius between separate parts of his work, which rejoin each other, come to life, are henceforth inseparable, are they not his finest creative intuitions? His sister has told us how overjoyed he was, that day when he conceived this idea, and I think it is just as magnificent an idea as if he had conceived it before he began his great work. It is a light that dawned, that suddenly encompassed parts of his work that till then had lain scattered and wan, and which united them, brought them to life, illuminated them; but that light is none the less a part of his intention.

Sainte-Beuve's other criticisms are just as absurd. Having upbraided Balzac for those "refinements of style" which he unfortunately lacked, he then upbraided him for faults of taste which were only too really his; but for an example picks on a sentence that

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comes from one of those pieces of admirable writing which, when all is said, Balzac has in plenty, where the style is recast and unified by the idea, where the sentence is a whole; that about the old maids "living scattered about the town, where they might be looked on as so many capillary vessels of a plant, aspiring after tittle-tattle and the secrets of every household as leaves thirst for dew, mechanically sucking them up and transmitting them to the Abbé Troubert, as leaves transmit to the stalk the moisture they have breathed in." And a few pages later comes the sentence denounced by Sainte-Beuve: "Such was the substance of the remarks cast forth by the capillary tubes of the great female confabulation and obligingly repeated by the city of Tours." He dares to account for Balzac's success by saying that he flattered the failings of women, in particular those of them who were no longer in their first youth (*La Femme de Trente Ans*): "My stern friend said: Henri IV conquered France town by town, M. de Balzac has conquered his sickly public by infirmities. Today, women of thirty, tomorrow those of fifty (there have even been those of sixty), the day after tomorrow the anaemic, in Claës the deformed, etc." And he dares add another reason for Balzac's rapid spread of popularity throughout France: "It is his cleverness in choosing the series of places where he will plant his successive novels. In a street in Saumur the traveler will be shown the house where Eugénie Grandet lived, and at Douai, Claës' house is probably already decided on. The owner of La Grenadière, easy-going man of Touraine that he is, must swell with modest pride. The author earns the submission of every town where he installs his characters by the compliments he pays it." That Sainte-Beuve, writing of Musset's admission that he loved both sweetmeats and roses, should add: "When one has loved so widely . . ."[5] one can accept. But that he should try to defame Balzac for the very vastness of his design, for the multiplicity of his portraits, that he should call this an intimidating jumble: "Subtract *La Femme de Trente Ans, La Femme Abandonnée, Le Réquisitionnaire, La Grenadière, Les Célibataires,* from his stories; subtract from his novels the story of *Louis Lambert* and his masterpiece *Eugénie Grandet,* what a mob of volumes, what a cloud of stories, novels of all kinds, drolatic, economic, philosophic, magnetic and theosophic, still remain!" —Well, but that was the

5 One of the things he liked saying, and he said it about Chateaubriand too.

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very greatness of Balzac's achievement. Sainte-Beuve said of him that he cast himself on the nineteenth century as on his subject, that society is a thing of the female gender, that society wanted a portrait, that he was that painter, that he painted it without any regard to tradition, that he brought the methods and expedients of painting up to date in order to comply with the ambition and coquetry of a society that was resolved to be its own precedent and to resemble nothing but itself. But Balzac did not have such a straightforward portraiture in mind, at any rate in the plain sense of painting exact likenesses. His books resulted from splendid ideas, ideas of splendid pictures, if you like (for he often thought of one art in terms of another), but in that case from a splendid artistic effect, from a splendid pictorial idea. As he saw an artistic effect as a splendid idea, in the same way he could see the idea of a book as an artistic effect. His mind's eye showed him a picture where there was something strikingly original and compelling. Imagine a writer nowadays who would have the idea of treating the same theme twenty times over in different lights, and who would feel that he was doing something as deep, as subtle, as powerful, overwhelming, original, and striking as Monet's fifty cathedrals or forty water lilies. An ardent picture-lover, Balzac at times delighted in the thought that he too had a splendid idea for a picture, for a picture that people would rave about; but it was always an idea, a ruling idea, not unpremeditated portraiture, as Sainte-Beuve took it to be. From that point of view even Flaubert worked with less of a preconceived idea than he. Color of *Salammbô, Bovary*. Beginning on a subject that doesn't appeal to him. Takes whatever's handy to get to work on. But all the great writers coalesce somewhere, and are like different moments, sometimes incompatible, of a single man of genius whose life is coterminous with the story of mankind. Where Flaubert coalesces with Balzac is where he said: "I've got to have a glorious finish for Félicité."

Because of this true-to-life reality in Balzac's novels, by knowing them we come to see a sort of literary quality in a hundred everyday occurrences which till then we should have looked on as too accidental for it. But it is just the law of such accidents that emerges from his books. Don't let us hark back to his characters and events in their lives. We needn't repeat among ourselves what others have

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said. But suppose we take a prostitute who has read Balzac and who, in some place where she is unknown, feels a genuine love which is returned; or go further, take a man who has a scoundrely past, or a bad name in politics, for instance, and who in some place where he is unknown makes delightful friendships, gathers a pleasant circle about him, reflects that when, as soon as they will, these people begin to find out who he is, they may turn away from him, and casts about for some means to avert the storm. Driving alone through the lanes of that holiday landscape which he will go away from, and where disagreeable stories about him will soon be current, he escorts an uneasy melancholy that is not without its charms, because he has read *Les Secrets de la Princesse de Cadignan,* he knows he is a participant in a situation which is in some way literary and derives a certain beauty from this. While the carriage bears him through the autumnal lanes toward friends who still trust him, his uneasiness is tempered by a charm which would not possess the sadness of love if there were no such thing as poetry. If the crimes attributed to him are only imaginary, he has even more reason to count the hours until his cronies d'Arthez, de Rastignac and de Marsay are dragged through the mire. The truth of Balzac's situations—a truth somehow contingent and personal, so that one remembers so many of the situations in terms of those who take part in them, as for instance, that of Rastignac marrying the daughter of his mistress Delphine de Nucingen, or Lucien arrested on the eve of his marriage with Mlle. de Grandlieu, or Vautrin inheriting from Lucien de Rubempré whose fortune he had tried to make, like the Lantys' fortune, founded on a cardinal's love for a eunuch, the little old man to whom all pay their respects—such truth is here striking. And there are those subtle truths, gathered from the surface of fashionable life and all with enough general applicability for one to be able to say long afterwards: How true that is! And there are truths that go deeper, like Paquita Valdès loving precisely the man who resembles the woman she lives with; like Vautrin keeping the woman who can see his son, Sallenauve, every day; like Sallenauve marrying the daughter of Mme. de l'Estorade. There, beneath the patent external action of the plot, run the mysterious laws of feeling and of flesh and blood.

The only thing that is rather worrying about this interpretation of his works is that these are just the things he never mentions in

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his letters; where he says of his slightest works that they are sublime, where he dismisses *La Fille aux Yeux d'Or* with the utmost disdain, and doesn't mention the close of *Les Illusions Perdues* or that marvelous scene I have been talking about. The character of Eve, which to us seems trivial, seemed to him, so he says, another great find. But all this may depend on the chance of which letters have survived, and even of which letters he wrote.

Sainte-Beuve does as he always does about Balzac. Instead of discussing Balzac's *Femme de Trente Ans,* he discusses women of thirty in general, and after a few words about Balthasar Claës (in *La Recherche de l'Absolu*) he talks about a real-life Claës who actually left a book about his own searchings for the absolute, and gives long quotations from this production—of no literary value, needless to say. Looking down from the height of his false and baleful ideal of the gentleman of letters, he misjudges Balzac's harshness toward Steinbock (in *La Cousine Bette*), that mere amateur who conceives nothing, who produces nothing, who does not understand that to be an artist one must devote the whole of oneself to art. Here Sainte-Beuve rears up with ruffled dignity against the phrase that Balzac uses: "Homer . . . cohabited with his Muse." It is not, perhaps, very happily expressed. But really there can be no interpreting the masterpieces of the past unless one judges them from the standpoint of those who wrote them, and not from the outside, from a respectful distance, and with all academic deference. That the outward conditions of literary production should have changed during the course of the last century, that the calling of the man of letters should have become a more absorbing and excluding affair, is quite possible. But the inward, mental laws of that production cannot have changed. That a writer should be a genius occasionally, *so that* for the rest of his time he may lead the pleasant life of a cultured social dilettante, is as false and silly a notion as that of a saint pursuing a life of the austerest contemplation so that in Paradise he may lead a life of vulgar enjoyment. One is nearer to understanding the great writers of the ancient world if one understands them as Balzac did, than as Sainte-Beuve did. Dilettantism has never created anything. Even Horace was certainly closer to Balzac than to M. Daru or M. Molé.

(*Translated from the French by Sylvia Townsend Warner*)

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# POEMS

## ORDER OF DIET

Salt of the soil and liquor of the rock
is all the thick land's food and mead.
And jaws of cattle grip up
stuffs of pasture for their bellies' need.
We, at table with our knives,
cut apart and swallow other lives.

The stone is milked to feed the tree;
the log is killed when the flame's hungry.
To arise in the other's body?
Flank of the heifer we glut, we spend,
to redden our blood. Then do we send
her vague spirit higher? Does the grain
come to better fortune in our brain?

Ashes find their way to green;
the worm is raised into the wing;
the sluggish fish to muscle slides;
eventual chemistry will bring
the lightning bug to the shrewd toad's eye.
It is true no thing of earth can die.

What then feeds on us? On our blood
and delectable flesh: the flood
of flower to fossil, coal to snow,
genes of glacier and volcano?
And our diamond souls that are bent
upward? To what beast's intent
are we the fodder and nourishment?

**May Swenson**

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## THE TOWN DUMP, WELLFLEET

*The art of our necessities is strange,*
*That can make vile things precious.*

A mile out in the marshes, under a sky
Which seems to be always going away
In a hurry, on that Venetian land threaded
With hidden canals, you will find the city
Which seconds ours (so cemeteries, too,
Reflect a town from hillsides out of town),
Where Being most becomingly ends up
Becoming some more. From cardboard tenements,
Windowed with cellophane, or simply tenting
In paper bags, the angry mackerel eyes
Glare at you out of stove-in, sunken heads
Far from the sea; the lobster, also, lifts
An empty claw in his most minatory
Of gestures; oyster, crab, and mussel shells
Lie here in heaps, savage as money hurled
Away at hell gate. If you want results,
These are results.
Objects of value or virtue,
However, are also to be picked up here,
Though rarely, lying with bone and rotten meat,
Eggshells and mouldy bread, banana peels
No one will slip on, apple cores that caused
Neither the fall of man nor a theory
Of gravitation. People do throw out
The family pearls by accident, sometimes,
Not often; I've known dealers in antiques
To prowl this place by night, with flashlights, on
The off-chance of somebody's having left
Derelict chairs which will turn out to be
By Hepplewhite, a perfect set of six
Going to show, I guess, that in any sty
Someone's heaven may open and shower down
Riches responsive to the right dream; though
It is a small chance, certainly, that sends

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The ghostly dealer, heavy with fly-netting
Over his head, across these hills in darkness,
Stumbling in cut-glass goblets, lacquered cups,
And other products of his dreamy midden
Penciled with light and guarded by the flies.

For there are flies, of course. A dynamo
Composed, by thousands, of our ancient black
Retainers, hums here day and night, steady
As someone telling beads, the hum becoming
A high whine at any disturbance; then,
Settled again, the flies shine in the sun
Like oil-drops, or are invisible as night,
By night.
All this continually smoulders,
Crackles, and smokes with mostly invisible fires
Which, working deep, rarely flash out and flare,
And never finish. Nothing finishes.
Among the flies, the purifying fires,
The hunters by night, acquainted with the art
Of our necessities, and the new deposits
That each day wastes with treasure, you may say
There should be ratios. You may sum up
The results, if you want results. But I have seen
Wild sea-birds, drawn to the carrion and flies,
Assembled in some numbers here, their wings
Shining with light, their flight enviably free,
Their music marvelous, though sad, and strange.

**Howard Nemerov**

## PASTORALE PARISIENNE

You who taught fear
its trafficking wealth, deft
in the courts and the slums like a rose
in its petals and thorns, to this
you have brought me?

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This grief that is proud, this unrest
so settled, no shape they will take,
no act they will do, will do.

The cracks in the wall,
day's shell-pale moon by, mistake
for a world? The tablecloth, checked
like an Aztec, is Alpine enough
to fix me plenty.

Leaves the wall scribbles,
paper clambering roses held in lame air,
these propose terror timidity dares.

Grief has its eclogues,
flutes chalk and chagrin, a green
gadding sward not the world can gainsay,
while the vermin go humming
in these cracks their adequate lives.

I sit in the room, late noon
and long in my winter, keeping
the fatted flocks, with the roses,
glittering in the ice, shaken by root's
far-away itch.
Only day can play
drab, play shadow to this.
But you, going out, coming in,
constant as tides, silent by my side
like a growing,
you bring back
from your sleep confidings
of that openness grief in its arrogance
has never touched, nor the person
of my pride.

**T. Weiss**

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## HOT NIGHT ON WATER STREET

A hot midsummer night on Water Street—
The boys in jeans were combing their blond hair
Watching the girls go by on tired feet;
And an old woman with a witch's stare
Cried "Praise the Lord!" She vanished on a bus
With hissing air brakes, like an incubus.

Three hardware stores, a barbershop, a bar,
A movie playing Westerns—where I went
To see a dream of horses called *The Star*. . . .
Some day, when this uncertain continent
Is marble, and men ask what was the good
We lived by, dust may whisper "Hollywood."

Then back along the river bank on foot
By moonlight. . . . On the West Virginia side
An owlish train began to huff and hoot;
It seemed to know of something that had died.
I didn't linger—sometimes when I travel
I think I'm being followed by the Devil.

At the newsstand in the lobby, a cigar
Was talkative: "Since I've been in this town
I've seen one likely woman, and a car
As she was crossing Main Street, knocked her down."
I was a stranger here myself, I said,
And bought the *New York Times,* and went to bed.

**Louis Simpson**

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## Lenore G. Marshall

# ECLIPSE

Two new men arrived at that discreet Southern hotel where winter months crept through summer sunshine with scarcely a mark to differentiate the days, for although in certain places time moves so fast that only the end of an hour or event reveals its passage, here when Mrs. Herrick thought it must be five o'clock it was always three. The new men were placed at a table in front of the door and other guests had to semicircle and stare above it when they crossed the dining room, pausing in their progress to mention to an acquaintance perhaps the degree achieved by the porch thermometer or, perhaps, the state of their health, or, perhaps, that there would be an eclipse of the moon tonight. Mrs. Herrick was pleased about the eclipse. She eavesdropped impersonally over her martini, her chicken and her book and had been advanced, if inquisitively, an initial step beyond bowing terms by some of the old-timers, the long-timers. She inspected the new men, an odd pair of strays among these gentlefolk. Dining by herself was beginning to seem less conspicuous to her: many of the tables for two were occupied by one since the hotel's clientele, being elderly, was composed largely of widows and widowers.

She turned from the newcomers to her neighbors. There was a frail white-haired gentleman, probably still unused to solitude and to taking care of himself, who rubbed painstakingly at his jacket where a buttery crumb had spilled. There was a rotund dowager bouncing indomitably as she passed like a played-out tennis ball, who craned at the title of Mrs. Herrick's book. "Oh! That? You'll die when you hear what *I'm* reading! Oh dear, what *is* its name?" There were gratified convalescents steered by paid companions: when they had come they could hardly hold cards in their hands. Occasionally there were women friends vacationing together or resigned couples. Mrs. Herrick, in her chosen role of outsider, wondered about them

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all but with no particular feeling toward any of them although she rather wished she had. Intent on pursuing certain values once bright and unfailing but which had become shadowed—since periods arise, Mrs. Herrick knew, wherein something lost cries Find me! Find me! —nonetheless these values ducked and eluded and even blacked out in the anonymous scene, as good as any other, where their chase had led; but what and where were they? What values, and she glanced about, what lights could be uncovered here? There was a Mrs. Phipps whose blue eyes twinkled like pebbles washed clean by the sea and whose late husband had for years been professor at some university, she looked as if there were more to her than to the others and Mrs. Herrick nodded gratefully when she stopped for a moment to observe, "Well, the papers say we're to have an eclipse soon, at nine." It was all very soothing, dull of course but soothing. Decent but dull. Because of despising the dullness one might almost a little include the decency. The level of sound in the dining room was usually this murmur through which clinking of dishes replaced conversation. But today the new men had made a change. Their voices rang out unabashed. "Yeah," drawled the one with a cigar stuck in his bull moose mouth, "I cleaned up a hundred thousand on that deal. That bunch in Johannesburg, they're slick, but they learned I was a smooth operator."

It was impossible not to hear. Mrs. Herrick shuddered and sipped her demi-tasse. "Pay dirt in rubber."—"Made a killing."—"Singapore? Brother, quite a town!—Mexico.—Don't need language, I never learned a word of none of 'em. You snap your fingers and they understand, they know who you are. Right?" At lunch it had been the same. Dollars and pounds and francs and black markets, the rewards of victors and tacticians, had been shooting out as if from a cannon. The second man had a floppy silver mane and a floppy candy-red face, some kind of charlatan or imposter, Mrs. Herrick decided. It was one thing for her to be objectively interested in strangers, another not to be able to escape them, and she tried to concentrate on her own thoughts. The eclipse of the moon, an unlikely episode no matter how science explained it. And this spot, this world remote from world, the folk who were its habitués, these smooth-fitting cogs, round pegs in snug round holes, herself here, that was unlikely too. Her fellow guests seemed scarcely to live yet

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to be content with no awareness at all of the eight million people packed urgently together in a northern city. Their contentment was of course blind, selfish, even depressing; contentment could be a fault, but the Greeks, Mrs. Herrick thought it was the Greeks, had a saying, Consider the road over which the fault has traveled. "Those natives," bellowed the first man, "they're not as dumb as they act. Sleep on the streets and you get sixteen hours' work out of 'em for a dime but they'd sneak up fast enough if you're not watching. Developing those areas okay but don't let 'em get any fancy ideas. Paris can mix if it wants but where I was raised we represent something, right? We keep our place, see, they keep theirs. Had myself a time in Singapore, a regular time. Pulled a fast one there too. Fort Worth feller I met on a train had hit a gusher back home, filthy rich, he let me in on a scheme, I sneaked up a little at a time—"

Mrs. Herrick deafened her ears. It almost worked for a while. These men go out and represent us, she thought, our plains and forests, our villages and cities, a fine lot of representatives we all are, and her eyes passed angrily and despairingly over her neighbors, over Mrs. Phipps too obviously enjoying the ice cream, without finding a place to put their allegiance. Her spine stiffened to invite self-sufficiency in the sudden onslaught of isolation between forces. A chaste little sunset had sunk beyond the windows and above flame vine and palm roofs the full moon ascended innocent of the adventure that would presently befall it. Simplicity and eternity were in that full moon. Mrs. Herrick felt in her bones that life is immortal. The light of the moon proved that the hallowed does triumph over the unhallowed, freedom over slavery, forever over death. Now Mrs. Phipps, thought Mrs. Herrick, catching for an instant an inquiring clean blue gaze across several tables, one might have something in common with Mrs. Phipps, one really might and be thankful for it, despite the retirement from life that age always seems to give. Barriers, transparent as glass, divided them, one human being from another. Mrs. Herrick felt apologetic, amused, even weary of her own years: there was nothing like being middle-aged in an old people's resort for arousing curiosity. For the fresh complexion, the long walks she took around the lake, the springy step with which she crossed the lobby, at least twenty years less drag on the heel

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than the others carried, any of these guests would have changed places with her. What would have astonished them was that she would have bowed to the change on some nights, welcomed it for that same undemanding contentment. They had finished! They accepted! They were fortunate! She felt that if she could take just one more step which they had already accomplished she would have the tenuous thing, whatever it was, in common with Mrs. Phipps.

The men never stopped. Stocks and bonds and hot spots, an enterprise here, an escapade there, were still mapping the world in their way. The world was shown: how civilization swooped through hell holes, master hands seized keys, took tribute; new emissaries, like the swashbuckling conquistadors of old with flag in hand, penetrated foreign lands, trailing through wildernesses the name of their continent, their nation, as introduction and souvenir. A shaft sunk into yellow desert sand, a blast set off by sweating black men amidst jungle foliage, the hammering of a drill raising green birds into sun, such images that appeared briefly in Mrs. Herrick's mind were overlaid, were turned into paper money, fluttered away. Pausing with his cigar in one hand, his spoon in the other, the fat loquacious member of the team interrupted himself to shout boisterously, "What's your name, waiter? George?" "Charles." "Charles? Haw! George, does this place die at nine o'clock?" Mrs. Herrick fingered her book, her velvet bag. Mail from home picked up at the desk before dinner was in the bag. The women at nearby tables seldom received a letter so that as a rule out of delicacy for them she kept hers to read in her own room later. The letters burned in her bag; because of the moon they would have to wait longer than usual. She glanced at her watch.

She signed the check, moved swiftly through the door. People in the cheerful lobby were discussing the eclipse. "I've seen enough of them in my day," a gentleman with a spade of goatee on his chin and Phi Beta Kappa key on his belt was saying, ending the subject. Groups began making up bridge tables. Still quickly Mrs. Herrick walked past them and into the sun parlor, where tall glass doors provided a view of gardens, lake, heavens. Here in deference to the impending event nobody had switched on the chandeliers. In the blackness she made out a sprinkle of quiet spectators sitting in a row as before the curtain of an unpopular play. She found a seat with empty chairs on either side.

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It had begun. The moon, inviolable a short while ago, now poised nicked over treetops draped in their sad gray-haired Spanish moss. Although a shadow impinged upon it the moon's light still implied forever, a grave promise.

The minutes began to tick, slow, counted, changing. Minute by minute a veil crept inward over the white round disc, like a cataract over an eye. The stars watched, spoke silence. Flame vine, shrimp bush, palms, lake with its false dense cover of water, space beyond, watched, waited, riveted into an enchantment. A piece of the moon was eaten away. Half of the moon went. Mrs. Phipps tiptoed in, interrupting, unwelcome, an intruder where only sharing would do, and without speaking took one of the empty chairs at Mrs. Herrick's left.

The promise of the full moon, that it can never be disturbed, has an imperceptible rhythm. It belied what was happening and Mrs. Herrick thought of the Moonlight Sonata, its statement of finality, note leading note, following note, the lucent oncoming beat of statement, statement and answer. But small, smaller the moon shrank, a sick animal, voiceless and helpless, a dying woman refusing to go, while all the stars brightened tremendously, defiant silver pricks coming into their own, and a plane or meteor, stronger than the moon, darted across the sky. Minute by minute a rusting veil encroached, minute by minute the light succumbed. They claim, Mrs. Herrick remembered, that the moon is brightest after an eclipse, a miracle of brightness. In an instant nine o'clock would strike. The small brown moon was a grinning jack o'lantern, a lifeless skull. Later, even in a few moments, the miracle would begin. How can miracles begin? Breath was a conscious lonely feat waiting for the miracle.

The two men entered, planted themselves at Mrs. Herrick's right, the loquacious one lit a fresh cigar and continued an anecdote in which he was engaged. His voice boomed through stillness as though he and his companion were alone. "So this night club in Rio she's at now, it's swank like he said, see, and he said I'd dance with her. I said I wouldn't. He said, 'Sure you will, she'll spot you, she's learned her stuff since she quit the States, she spots the newcomers and she spots who's got a bankroll' and I said, 'You'll see.' Well, after some singing kicking girl stuff she came on the floor and there was a buzz."

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So the men were in Brazil now. The heavens came through the window but the men were in Brazil. Mrs. Herrick looked straight ahead. The moon had moved into eclipse. There was an incredible ugly blot on the indigo sky where a pure full moon had been. Without stirring Mrs. Herrick sensed that Mrs. Phipps looked straight ahead too.

"Like you'd expect, quite a dame except—. She circulated around dancing with 'em. Then she came to our table and said, 'Come awn, you-all, dawnce with me.' "

He paused. The brown blot had not changed yet. Nobody would dare to name this the moon. His voice rang. " 'No, I won't dance with you,' I said. 'Lordy me, dawnce with me, big boy,' she says. 'No, I won't dance with you.' She cocks her head, 'Dance with me!' she says and I say 'I don't dance with niggers. I'm an American. Get away.' You should have seen her scuttle."

At the same instant that Mrs. Herrick stood up Mrs. Phipps stood up and they wheeled about and they took long steps and they went toward the door together. Neither one spoke. At the door Mrs. Herrick turned slowly for a last look at the heavens. Silver rimmed the lower line of the moon. She stood as though there were no other creature on earth, alone, fastening her eyes on that brightening edge. Presently the silver rim would spread, have mercy, disrobe the dark blot. She could visualize how, more piercing than ever before, dazzling with ascendant life, freed of her misalliance, her encounter with death, the moon would sail full and disenchanted, not fire, not ice, triumphantly serene through the night.

Mrs. Herrick was aware of Mrs. Phipps's clean blue glance as they walked away, side by side, steps matching, down the hall. Mrs. Phipps nodded. Suddenly Mrs. Herrick liked Mrs. Phipps very much.

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# ART CHRONICLE

## THE UNITY OF PICASSO

Seeing the Picasso 75th anniversary exhibition[1] is like visiting one of the great museums of Western art. One turns swiftly from a canvas of lush, Venetian sensuality to a drawing of bone-dry economy and restraint; from a scene of grotesque fantasy to one of immediate, wracking anguish; from a Mediterranean idyll of heroic breadth and monumentality to a miniature of magical smallness and precision. Yet these are not works by Titian and Ingres, Goya and Gruenewald, Michelangelo and Van Eyck; this overwhelming succession of masterpieces is the work of one man. Experienced in such full scope, from 1898 to 1956, Picasso's art poses its perennial question most insistently: how can the works of one artist look so different and yet be so alike?

There can be no simple explanation of the unity that underlies Picasso's apparent diversity, yet surely an essential aspect of the problem is related to the master's fundamental fidelity to objective fact. Like his Spanish ancestors, Velasquez, Ribera, Zurbarán, Goya, he accepts the data of reality with so intense a respect that pictorial artifice or manner seldom triumphs over the artist's compelling description of his subject. But unlike these older masters and, indeed, unlike his contemporaries, Picasso explores a range of experience unparalleled in the history of art and, as a necessary corollary, his work demands a visual vocabulary whose diversity is similarly unique. Next to Picasso, other masters of modern art—Mondrian, Matisse, Klee, even Miró—seem narrowly circumscribed in the areas they investigate, and their visual languages offer a comparable homogeneity. But how could the fabulously inquisitive Picasso capture the vast and fragmented worlds of twentieth-century experience with a single vocabulary? How could he find one style alone capable of defining a contemporary world which must assimilate simultaneously the discoveries of Einstein and those of Freud, the realities of Guernica and those of the "museum without walls"? It might be said that what is more awesome about Picasso is

1 Seen first in New York, the exhibition is now traveling to Chicago and Philadelphia.

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not the diversity of his styles, but rather the diversity of things he chooses to reveal to us.

Above all, the world Picasso describes is anthropocentric. In keeping with the Spanish pictorial tradition, landscape is a very minor facet of his art and his still lifes, at their greatest, will often evoke qualities of human passion and drama that are surprising to those used to the French interpretation of apples and tabletops as inanimate objects manipulated for aesthetic ends alone. Somehow the human being is never far from the center of Picasso's stage, though it appears in multiple guises. Consider, for example, two pictures about sleep. In the 1919 gouache, *Sleeping Peasants,* Picasso seeks and finds a pictorial equivalent for the condition of heavy physical slumber. He shows us a somnolent peasant couple whose sodden weight bears down upon a haystack in what is almost a parody of gross torpor. Thirteen years later, in the 1932 *Nude on a Black Couch,* Picasso again defines an aspect of sleep. But in this picture the heavy, earthbound forms of the peasants are completely flattened into undulant, linear rhythms, and the colors move from the harsh, sunlit glare of pink flesh and golden hay to a nocturnal world of blacks, lavenders, blues. Yet this is not evidence, as some would suspect, of a pictorial chameleon who is simply repainting an earlier picture in a new style. In the later work Picasso has chosen instead to describe the internal and not the external experience of sleep, and to express this, a new vocabulary is mandatory. It is not a country siesta he now shows us, but a magical night realm in which subconscious fantasy releases the body from its imprisoning weight and strange fetal, germinal images emerge in colors that would vanish under the clear light of noon. And if in the same year, 1932, Picasso seizes upon the spectacle of a woman bather cavorting with a beach ball, he must again find an appropriate language to convey the facts of this amusing kinesthetic experience. A grotesque effusion of swelling breasts, buttocks and belly, she clumsily attempts to grasp the ball with globular hands whose lack of fingers speaks eloquently for the elusiveness of the ball. And as a final, masterly touch, Picasso describes the ball as absolutely flat, in witty opposition to the spherical creature who pursues it. How better could Picasso have extracted the essential geometric likenesses and gravitational differences between the woman and the ball?

Or consider another document of this respect for fact. The *Man with a Lollipop* of 1938 does not use barbed and jagged shapes simply as ends in themselves; this vocabulary unveils to us the nature of the objects Picasso has chosen to paint—a spear-shaped lollipop, five gnarled and dirty fingers, a straw hat's torn weave, a bristling beard

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on a sun-scorched face. Picasso defines for us the quintessence of prickliness in this scrupulous rendering of reality, a prickliness to be compared in its menacing presence to the real nails which actually project from the collage *Guitar* of 1926.

This fidelity to objective reality is apparent everywhere, whether one turns to the *Dwarf Dancer* of 1901, with its frank statement of physical abnormality so recurrent in the Spanish tradition; to the cubist collages, which pay equal homage to the unique identity of fragments taken from a non-aesthetic world; to the journalistic truth of *Guernica* and the piercing teardrops and swimming nostrils of the women who rise from its ashes; or to the 1938 portrait of Maia, where the artist's objectivity is almost inhuman in the way he can see his own infant daughter holding a toy sailor as a diminutive image of ritualistic horror not unlike the almost unbearably brutal *Girl with Cock* of the same year.

Indeed, without this detachment, without this passionate respect for the particular and the diverse, Picasso could not be that very rare phenomenon in twentieth-century art—a great portraitist. Throughout his career he can always record the shifting inward and outward aspects of an individual, be it the oracular wisdom and imperturbability of Gertrude Stein in 1906; the fragrant, childish delicacy and innocence of his son Paul in 1924; or the brooding psychic intensity of Dora Maar in 1942. Even within the presumably unreal language of analytic cubism, Picasso can miraculously project the physiognomy and personality of a sitter. In the Wilhelm Uhde portrait of 1910, the coruscating web of planes is no more immediate than the tightly pursed lips, the sharply defined forehead, the impeccable dress, the tautness of intellect. At this time, or at any other time, Braque could not have painted so incisive a portrait, nor would he have wished to. The language of cubism, which for the Frenchman was essentially artifice, remained for the Spaniard, even at its most abstract moment, a vehicle for recording reality.

Yet the realities which Picasso records are not exclusively external to the work of art as an aesthetic object. Picasso knows that art is art and not nature, and much of his creative energy has been devoted to expressing this fact. Indeed cubism and, more particularly, collage offer the most acute description of that tension between the work of art as an artificial fact and the object it pretends to represent. So convincingly, in fact, has Picasso's cubism demonstrated that a pictorial language has a life both dependent upon and independent from nature that his ostensible "return to nature" in 1915 often looks no more or no less remote from literal appearances than his cubist work. Paradoxically,

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the Ingresque drawing of Ambroise Vollard of that year can look as invented, as arbitrary in its language of particularized external description as the radically simplified synthetic cubist *Harlequin* which follows it; and in the same way, the ravishing outline drawings of the late 1910's look just as abstract, for all their seeming fidelity to nature, as the earlier cubist drawings. And lest this point be unclear—that pictorial means are as real as pictorial ends—Picasso, in 1928, reaffirms it in the didactic *Painter and Model.* For here, the familiar mimetic relation of art to nature is reversed; the reality of the seated painter and his female model is described by the most unreal cubist inventions, whereas the unreality of the image the artist creates on the canvas is presented as a relatively naturalistic profile. In this light, it is also worth noting that the seeming illusionism of the monumental sculptured forms of the early 1920's is never thoroughly realized in consistently three-dimensional terms; at some point they invariably flatten out against the picture plane in order to insist upon the two-dimensional fact of the canvas. And however plastic the *Seated Bather* of 1930 may appear, her predatory, insect-like anatomy is nevertheless impossible to reproduce in sculpture, for ultimately it pays fully as much homage to the demands of pictorial flatness as do the paintings of synthetic cubism.

Picasso's assertion of the fundamentally artificial nature of a work of art as opposed to the external reality it describes is evident throughout his entire post-cubist *oeuvre.* Each different pictorial language he speaks takes on the quality of an objective phenomenon to be scrutinized as carefully as the phenomena of nature, and for this reason he can rediscover, like his almost exact contemporaries, Joyce and Stravinsky, a multitude of past styles. Just as Stravinsky can rejuvenate the sound of Machaut, Pergolesi, or Tchaikovsky, Picasso can recreate the look of Ingres, Delacroix, Gruenewald, or Catalan Romanesque painting. Thus at the very time, 1921-23, that he newly explores the ample, generalized forms of the antique-Italian tradition in the archaic serenity of the *Pipes of Pan* or the Michelangelesque gigantism of the 1921 *Mother and Child,* he can also paint the same figure type in miniatures whose exquisite smallness and nuanced rendering of atmospheric values recall the counter-tradition of the Flemish primitives.

In a sense, then, Picasso has no style, for the basic vitality of his art depends upon his continual rejection of preconceived formulae and his insistence upon a direct response to an unprecedented variety of objective stimuli. If this is true, it may in part explain the decline in the quality of his art from about 1939 to the present. In these works, few of which approach the vigor and immediacy of even his most casual

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achievements of the first forty years, Picasso may have lost that essential contact with a particular reality outside himself. Instead, he has turned for stimulus to his own earlier inventions, and the result is self-destructive. Other contemporary artists who work within the refined limits of their own stylistic artifice can do this with profit—consider Matisse, Brancusi, Mondrian—but Picasso cannot. The limp, mannered products of the last decade are almost mistakable for works of a Picasso imitator. Perhaps Picasso is now of too early a generation to define for us the new experiences of the period ushered in by the Second World War. It would be more than pointless and ungenerous, though, to complain about the very great man who has given definitive visual expression to the major realities of the first half of our century—the revolutionary aesthetic and spatial concepts of cubism; the subconscious imagery of the *Girl before a Mirror*; the ominous moral and political facts of *Guernica*.

**Robert Rosenblum**

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# BOOKS

## THE NATURE OF NOVELS

JUSTINE. By Lawrence Durrell. E. P. Dutton. $3.50.
THE VELVET HORN. By Andrew Lytle. McDowell, Obolensky. $3.95.
LOVE AMONG THE CANNIBALS. By Wright Morris. Harcourt, Brace. $3.50.
REVOLUTION AND ROSES. By P. H. Newby. Knopf. $3.50.
THE ORDEAL OF GILBERT PINFOLD. By Evelyn Waugh. Little, Brown. $3.75.
VOSS. By Patrick White. Viking. $5.00.
COUP DE GRACE. By Marguerite Yourcenar. Translated by Grace Frick in collaboration with the author. Farrar, Straus & Cudahy. $3.00.

Reading seven novels with the doubtful object of reviewing them caused me some disagreeable thoughts. To read a novel and be entranced, amused, bored, is perfectly within one's rights as a private citizen, and there is an end of the matter. To read a novel in order to give an opinion of its quality is something else. Something professional enters, the tiny critical hairs at the nape of the neck erect themselves; even the preliminary inspection of the dust jacket (critics in movies are always shown doing this) is keen, suspicious, diagnostic. Since knowledge is of its nature more or less invariably knowledge of evil, the novelist is at a disadvantage in this encounter, where the critic may shift the emphasis at will between Beauty and Force (the limiting terms of all criticism) simply to improve his attack. Perhaps the encounter itself doesn't matter, or doesn't matter much. But if the critic is conscientious, and if there be any artistry at all in criticism, the problematic element in the situation is increased by the critic's need and determination to rely, finally, more on what he feels than on what he knows. He should, ideally, know a good deal, but he writes at a clever time, in which the power of technique to deceive and give the appearance of art is enormous; witness the quantity of "masterpieces" given the world weekly by reviewers. By the same reasoning, though, it is a time for which all the tricks have been run through rather often. It may be that literacy is eating itself, competent work being more available to more people than ever before, while art becomes ever more rare until it is widely (though quietly, very quietly) suspected of being impossible.

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(But perhaps that is a characteristic not uniquely of this 'now,' but of any 'now'; to know what is truly contemporary has probably at all times been difficult.)

I had these thoughts not because all these books are bad books, but precisely because most of them exhibit in their widely differing ways both skill and taste. They are all written by experienced writers, and I suppose that as a group, which they are solely because they appear at more or less the same moment, they would compare favorably with any other seven novels selected on the same basis. Yet much of what I have to say is simply negative, not critical rage but no particular response at all beyond the mild pleasure in professional competence which is the critical equivalent of saying "Nice shot!" in tennis. I wish I could have felt more often in agreement with a character (a novelist) in Mr. Durrell's *Justine*: "The modern novel! The *grumus merdae* left behind by criminals upon the scene of their misdeeds." But these novelists are mostly not criminals at all, but only novelists—which is what we have asked for, and what we shall, I suppose, continue to get.

Something touching this view of the matter is finely said by Evelyn Waugh in presenting Gilbert Pinfold (a novelist):

> It may happen in the next hundred years that the English novelists of the present day will come to be valued as we now value the artists and craftsmen of the late eighteenth century. The originators, the exuberant men, are extinct, and in their place subsists and modestly flourishes a generation notable for elegance and variety of contrivance. It may well happen that there are lean years ahead in which our posterity will look back hungrily to this period, when there was so much will and so much ability to please.

As an epitaph this will no doubt read extremely well; only as an intention does it seem faintly contemptible.

I shall discuss first three novels which have in common only the fact of their being set in the past. Not the very deep past—two in the nineteenth century, one just after the First World War—but they rely more or less upon the sense of another time which in itself supplies a kind of prospectively aesthetic distance. None of the three can be dismissed as 'historical novels' or mere genre painting, they all stay well away from great events, but I was a little put off by the somewhat facile pathos of period manners which seemed in varying degrees to infect the styles of these works.

Marguerite Yourcenar's *Coup de Grâce* is introduced as a true story, "derived from the oral account of the principal character con-

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cerned." This novella, evidently an earlier work than the fine *Memoirs of Hadrian,* is likewise a reminiscence in the first person: Erick von Lhomond, a soldier of fortune, recounts to his comrades an episode of his youth, twenty years past, when, just after the First World War, he led a corps of volunteers against the Bolsheviks in Kurland. The story, set against the military action, concerns von Lhomond's love for his boyhood friend Conrad, and the love of Conrad's sister Sophie, in turn, for von Lhomond. Both relations are hidden from the excluded third parties, until discovery brings on, or imposes, the catastrophe. I say "imposes," because the accidents of war cooperate in such a way with the working out of personal destinies as to impair the strict tragic design, making it seem adventitious. Though Mme. Yourcenar disclaims any political intention for her narrative, I could not help thinking that there is a species of existentialist melodrama no more convincing than the common kind; something I thought also about Camus's *The Fall.*

I am sorry to have to give it as my opinion that this work fails of any profound effect; there seem such good reasons why it ought not to have failed, among them the evident intelligence of the author, the tension promised by the anecdote, and the fineness of the style so far as this can be seen in translation; yet among so many virtues I miss some essential.

The fictional convention of the memoir—that beautiful and somehow specifically civilized convention according to which the story and the telling of the story are of equal importance—seems to work very awkwardly here. The publishers make a particular point of "the swiftness of this narrative," but short as the book is I cannot agree that it moves rapidly. The narrator's somewhat professionally world-weary aphorisms and generalities more than interrupt, they seem often to replace, the action. Moreover, this narrator seems in another way ill-suited to the business of narrating; he is a man for whom the paradoxical value of the first person singular—its reflection of others, its capacity for portraiture, as in Marlow's narrations, or Marcel's, or Ishmael's—scarcely exists. The other elements of his story, Conrad and Sophie, are not at all convincing; the existence of the one cannot contend against so vast an indifference, that of the other is but dimly and intermittently perceptible among the aphorisms. Consequently there is no tension, and the resolution, itself rather mechanical, resolves nothing; while von Lhomond's tone of resignation, ranging from stoicism through cynicism to mere boredom, finally succeeded in convincing me, I fear, that all this did not matter in the least.

Patrick White, an Australian, comes to us very highly recommended

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for his previous novel *The Tree of Man,* which I have not seen, and the present work, *Voss,* is issued by the publisher with a natural confidence as "the finest novel of a great artist," a judgment supported by the Book-of-the-Month Club, which has made it a Selection.

The story, set in nineteenth-century Australia, concerns a continent-crossing expedition led by a German immigrant, Johann Ulrich Voss, and financed by the merchant Bonner with whose niece, Laura Trevelyan, Voss falls in love. Their love affair, since he is away in the outback during most of the novel, is conducted by letters which get delivered to no one but the reader, by dreams, visionary communications, and crises telepathically shared; this novelistic contraption for togetherness is invested by the author with a good deal of bardic sonority and mystical falala. There is a subplot concerning a servant girl who dies giving birth to an illegitimate child; the child is adopted by Laura Trevelyan and given the name of Mercy; this is deeply symbolic.

The expedition, whose members appear to have been selected by the novelist simply as the likeliest people to perish in the wilderness, perishes (all but one, a convict) in the wilderness, in circumstances of which the reader is fully informed but the other, home-keeping characters are not. In the last part of the story we hear of one or two half-successful attempts to trace the true history of the matter, the old convict returns, not quite right in the head, to tell the truth no one believes, a statue of Voss is ceremonially unveiled, and we fade out on a view of Laura, older now, a schoolmistress who of course has never married, cherishing a past which makes her appear both mysterious and distinguished as well as some sort of symbol of faith in the future of Australia.

I found this book well done for what it is, a popular romance. This will appear a patronizing judgment but I must stand by it, since I also found this book pretentious, empty, and dull. Mr. White is a highly skilled writer, more so perhaps than quite a number of great masters have been if we look only at superficial qualities. All the externals of his action are done to a turn, with some slight idiosyncrasies of notation which suggest to the reader that this is *literature* ("In the resilient hall, the music continued to ache until it was time for supper"). His novel is essentially popular in its compound of "epic grandeur" with nice domestic detail (comparable to a "treatment" of the *Nibelungenlied,* say, by Katherine Mansfield), in its substantial but very magniloquent descriptions, shrewd observation of manners, soothing historical irony and somewhat sticky mystical eroticism. I have little doubt it will be widely viewed as "great," but it has no inwardness and its characters are for

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the most part not persons but stereotypes clothed in obsessions.

Given the state of letters in America, *Voss* will probably succeed at the expense of Andrew Lytle's *The Velvet Horn,* which is published about the same time; I hope the event will prove me wrong, but I have sad doubts.

I am not without objections to Mr. Lytle's procedures. In particular, to somewhat windy sentences, which in attempting a continuousness and natural fluency appear merely at times as overwrought. Examples are too long to quote, but after one speech he finds it appropriate to note that the speaker "was breathing like a wind-broke horse." Also I object to certain abrupt transitions between the fictional past and present, which perhaps I might have met more alertly, but which struck me as affected.

These traits, however, seriously disturb only in the first quarter of the book; some allowance must be made for getting acquainted with the style, as well as for the author's occasional awkwardnesses in beginning a tale which he has resolved to tell in the most difficult way of all, and the one in which success will be most rewarding. That is, to tell the story as it becomes known to the principal person, here a young man, Lucius Cree; to tell, in effect, how the story came to be a story, not merely how the past lives again in the present, but how the present comes to know the past which continuously determines it, and how accident progressively reveals itself as design. In the beginning of the story a felled tree kills a man; by the end, this isolated and apparently accidental event is seen as one tragical result of the weavings of many lives through many years, a result which itself enters into the determination of other lives.

As in chess, all combinations, especially the most beautiful, are sacrificial; about this kind it has not been enough noted, I think, that its penalties and weaknesses come at the beginning, with nearly a hundred pages of this novel given over to rambling discourses about family relations among persons not yet introduced, which I think even a more patient reader than myself might find unmemorable, but a great deal of which is essential to the understanding of the story. I had to go back a number of times from much further on, mainly for genealogical reasons but also to pick up identifying information about people who did not even appear, much less assume any distinctive individuality, until far into the development.

Granting that this happens, that some of it is my fault for reading carelessly and that some of it is indispensable to the form, there still seems a good bit too much. And even about the results of so much

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preparation I have some strictures: that a too great reliance on the figure of Lucius' uncle in his mythic and prototypical aspect as drunken sage and magician tended to make of him a 'character' in a disagreeably operatic sense; that the part of the catastrophe most closely involving this personage struck me as very arbitrarily produced; finally, that some scenes of macabre comedy failed to make any relevant effect.

The critic must point to such things as he sees them; they are flaws. All works of art are flawed, and this novel is a work of art. Books like *Voss* achieve a kind of high finish which does not much matter, but books like *The Velvet Horn,* which in so many places reaches a major solidity, and whose tensions, drawn with such difficulty, produce most moving resolutions, belong to the realm of letters not less because their tragedies are also in part the tragedies of their own composition.

P. H. Newby's *Revolution and Roses* is a comic novel. I want to be quite explicit about this, because the dust jacket drives the point home, with the related point that Mr. Newby is a comic writer, a good many times, and because it is not something that would have occurred to me independently. I have not read his earlier book *The Picnic at Sakkara,* which was also praised for its comic qualities, and so cannot say whether the present work is simply a lapse or whether some more general misunderstanding about comedy is at issue. Anyhow, I found *Revolution and Roses* strained, unconvincing and inconsequential. The plot, which I shall not report in detail, concerns the adventures of two Englishmen and an Englishwoman who, through their meeting with an Egyptian soldier, become involved in events having to do with the deposition of King Farouk. There are the usual comic misunderstandings, confusions of identity, etc. Very infrequently something funny is said, but the style in which all this is conducted is both labored and undistinguished, and given also to long explanations of what surely should be obvious. There is an occasionally visible ambition of producing deadpan political absurdities in the manner of the early Evelyn Waugh, but the results mostly resemble, in their dire determination of sophisticated fun, the mystery novels of Elliot Paul. I have sometimes been told I have no sense of humor, so not improbably some precious essence of Mr. Newby's novel simply has eluded me, but just getting through it was a long, hard pull.

Evelyn Waugh's new book, though I could not take it with any seriousness, was a pleasure to read. From the prevailing condition of style in the novel, where sentences grow huge with difficulties unfaced, and lush elaborations imply the novelist's belief that he is Swinburne,

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Mr. Waugh's writing stands out as a beautiful exception, constantly delighting by its crisp, accurate notation so little burdened with rhapsodic bric-a-brac.

*The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold* is as much a memoir as a novel. We are told in a prefatory note that Mr. Pinfold is largely based on Mr. Waugh, and his ordeal upon a brief bout of hallucinations suffered by the author a few years ago, to the recollection of which "nothing of importance has been added."

What happens to Mr. Pinfold, of whom at the age of fifty we are given a brilliant description (which may be read, perhaps, as savage beyond its intentions) is this: for the relief of certain minor but disturbing symptoms he embarks on a sea voyage. On shipboard, he overhears various private and conspiratorial conversations, music, religious services, and concludes that the ship's communication system, survival of the War, passes through his cabin: "the engineers had neglected to disconnect it." These overheard episodes soon assume, first in general and then personally, a punitive character, as Mr. Pinfold's mainly masochistic fantasies objectify themselves in threatening or seductive voices, whose owners for the most part cannot be identified among the passengers or crew. At last, after temporarily accepting explanations having to do with "existentialism and psychology and ghosts and diabolic possession," as well as something very like an orgone box, Mr. Pinfold leaves the ship, flies home to his wife, understands that he has suffered hallucinations, and begins to write an account called "The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold."

This is not much, though Mr. Waugh's skill keeps it lively a good deal of the time. As to what it means, well, there is now and then a touch of *symbolism* (the ship is the *Caliban,* and other Shakespearean murmurs are heard, mainly from *King Lear*: "Oh, let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven"). But "those who sought to detect cosmic significance in Mr. Pinfold's work, to relate it to fashions in philosophy, social predicaments or psychological tensions, were baffled by his frank, curt replies to their questionnaires. . . . Mr. Pinfold gave nothing away. Not that he was secretive or grudging by nature; he had nothing to give these students."

They must be odd students indeed who interpret novels by quizzing authors, but nothing will come of nothing, as King Lear also said, and these remarks do, I think, touch both the success and the limitation of Mr. Pinfold's later novels, this one included: their admirably polished character as things made, their "elegance and variety of contrivance" which result from "so much will and so much ability to please," are the

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measures also of a gracefully accepted slightness at the best, triviality at the worst. If Mr. Pinfold in his illness is forced to be "the horrified witness of a scene which might have come straight from the kind of pseudo-American thriller he most abhorred," if some of his sufferings also, though remotely, remind us of what Bloom suffered in Nighttown, it is understood all the while that these extremes are equally products of hallucination; capable of causing pain, but not *real.* Considered later, in health, and brought under the domination of a good wit and a better style, they will entertain many. As the prefatory note says of Mr. Waugh: "Since his disconcerting voyage he has learned that a great number of sane people suffer in this way from time to time. He believes this record may amuse them."

Of these three comedies, the one I enjoyed much the most was Wright Morris's *Love Among the Cannibals,* despite two difficulties, one minor and the other, if not major, at least more continuously disturbing than the first. The minor one is the love story, which even through the parody or satire, or because of this, seems somehow to be reflected from the one in *The Last Tycoon,* as though Mr. Morris were pointing out, on the one hand, what a joke that was, and on the other what a joke this is, the punch-line of both jokes being that all of it is true, and terrible, and sad. The other difficulty is with the first-person narration, which is not, like that of Mme. Yourcenar's book, in the style of a memoir, but free, wise-cracking and dramatic, and which runs woefully close, in everything but earnest dullness fortunately, to the manner of numberless detective novels in which the personal I has relentlessly been debased into the private eye, greatly to the detriment of character in fiction and perhaps elsewhere as well. Mr. Morris cannot be held responsible for the detective novels, but nevertheless there they are, on the scene—all over it, in fact—and they have made some tones of voice very near impossible. Where for Stendhal the problem of the "I" was its egotism, the current problem may be that no individual ego is reflected at all.

These objections are in considerable part overcome by Mr. Morris's book, which though slight and occasionally sentimental in its romantic toughness, is alive as well as lively, and has sustained episodes of savagely funny fable. The story is of a not quite first-rate song-writing team and their two girls (not girls: *chicks*), who go on an odd junket to Mexico, or Nature, or Eden, or anyhow Back There, where, as their immobilized car is gradually stripped down (to be reassembled only when they have abandoned any claim to own it), they too become as naked as Lear on his heath.

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It is a story about art, too, and I can see, through my objection, that Mr. Morris may have chosen his detective-story idiom both deliberately and shrewdly as the tritest idiom available. For while the superficial action tells how the cliché becomes real in love, the reflections of the narrator, a writer of "lyrics," constantly penetrate to the situation of the artist, whose business it is to make clichés real in art: "Every cliché in the world once had its moment of truth." "If you live in a world of clichés, as I do, some of them of the type you coined yourself, you may not realize how powerful they can be." So, renting a cabin from a motel proprietor for what are called immoral purposes: " 'We are in love,' I said, 'and want something good.' The freshness of the cliché disarmed him."

Taken this way the fable succeeds, I think, but at a disturbing expense; one might paradoxically say, at its own expense. How narrow the way, and how fastidious, even precious, must the artist be in a world so full of cheap plastic art works that every word, every feeling, every tonality, seems used up and dead and available only as its own parody.

The overt theme of Mr. Morris's book, however casual-appearing its treatment, is deep and serious: *all for love* in the most literal and sarcastic sense—love as destructive of wealth, pride, value, love as cannibalism, love as unalterably opposed to civilization, love as producing an anguish only dubiously purifying, an *askesis* not even redemptive, or redemptive only by negations. A religious book, really, where there is no religion to give constancy to its attack.

Something like this is the theme also of Lawrence Durrell's *Justine,* which opens appropriately with quotations from two great transvaluers, Freud and the Marquis de Sade (whose own *Justine* dealt with the punishment of virtue and the rewards of vice). Mr. Durrell's book deals, possibly, with the irrelevance of punishment and reward to either virtue or vice, and is not so much a novel, perhaps, as a hymn to a city, Alexandria, which is also a state of mind: "Alexandria was the great wine-press of love; those who emerged from it were the sick men, the solitaries, the prophets—I mean all who have been deeply wounded in their sex." The book is announced as the first of a series, and referred to as "this brief introductory memorial"—so that Mr. Durrell, along with C. P. Snow and Anthony Powell, seems, if only accidentally, to be in contention for the title of *le Proust anglais.* The comparison with Proust, however, does not come up except in certain details of style, inevitable perhaps in so reflective a work. But this book is, in every major respect, original and immensely impressive. I was reminded

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of another exceedingly beautiful and moving novel set in Africa, *Veronica,* by Laura Pope, which appeared in England several years ago, but I think has not been published here. Mr. Durrell's subject is somewhat similar, though his intention, and perhaps some of his powers of execution, are of greater scope.

*Justine* is a love story, and a meditation on love; also, like several major modern works, a novel about the novel, whose composition becomes the subject of itself. Several of the persons are novelists, others keep diaries, the poet Constantine Cavafy, "the old poet of the city," is alluded to often, and quoted, as an emblematic presence; finally, a little mysteriously, there is a character who shares with Graham Greene's Scobie only the name of Scobie, a job on the police force, and Roman Catholicism, but whose attitude to life is so formed as to constitute a backhanded kind of literary criticism.

Among all these reflectors the plot unwinds somewhat deviously, in fragmented and dispersed details which nonetheless form a pattern; perhaps also some of its materials will be further illuminated in successive novels of the projected series. The controlling metaphor, diffused throughout the design, is I think that of all human action seen as the search for knowledge: the exploration of self, the lovers' exploration of one another, the detective adventures of jealousy, the psychological adventures into the past, the novelist's or diarist's probing for motives and the cabalist's search for God, all are woven into a grand, pervasive figure, which emerges most clearly in the discovery that a religious study group and a talkative barber are also parts of a spy-ring, giving a strange, ascending hierarchy of gossip, espionage, gnosis. There is in all this a clear suggestion of allegory, rooted in Alexandria itself as both city of many and city of God, and going back to "the founders of the city, the soldier-god in his glass coffin. . . . Or that great square Negro head reverberating with a concept of God conceived in the spirit of pure intellectual play—Plotinus." This too I should expect might be further developed in the sequel.

I resist the temptation of raising that cry of "masterpiece!" not only because it is too much heard among us, but also because there are some things puzzling about this book, which I shall read again. I was even a trifle chilled at first by a tone of sophistication which I thought condescending: "for those of us who feel deeply and are at all conscious of the inextricable tangle of human thought there is only one response to be made—ironic tenderness and silence." Such remarks irritatingly tend to be parodies of themselves. But my doubts were soon dispelled, and I was drawn into the world of the book by its seriousness

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(which does not exclude wit) and the beautiful intelligence with which it explores the realm of passion, a word which is here to be understood in its original sense as *suffering*. Alone among these seven novelists, no less alone, perhaps, in all of contemporary fiction, Durrell gives a sense of the mystery of personality; perhaps precisely because he, or his narrator, does not have that professional concern for 'real characters' which is so often considered to be the mark of a talent for novel-writing. On the contrary, "For the writer people as psychologies are finished. The contemporary psyche has exploded like a soap-bubble under the investigations of the mystagogues. What now remains to the writer?" Possibly, as in this novel, what remains to the writer is the discovery again of a certain austerity belonging in former times to allegory; a spiritual heightening and exaggeration of the forms of things, away from the purely novelistic convention of 'individuality' (which, exhausted as it is, begins to produce either mere collections of details or, quite simply, monstrosities) and toward the perception once more of the wholeness of things, of "the city which we inhabited so briefly together: the city which used us as its flora—precipitated in us conflicts which were hers and which we mistook for our own."

Considering the sneering sense, currently, of the word 'Alexandrian' with reference to the arts, it would be odd and ironic, and historically most appropriate, if some renewal of the art of the novel should come precisely thence; and it may be happening. Surely Mr. Durrell, whose great talents are being realized more here than in his poetry, is reaching something deeper than all those real characters in all those real novels. I mean not only the brilliance of his delineations, but the sense you get beyond that of his power as "a poet of the historic consciousness" to reveal his people's necessities as rooted in the nature of things more than in the nature of novels. An illusion, perhaps, but the illusion on which the finest things solidly rest.

**Howard Nemerov**

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## POETRY CHRONICLE

BEST POEMS OF 1955. Borestone Mountain Poetry Awards. Stanford University Press. $3.50.
THE GREEN WALL. By James Wright. Foreword by W. H. Auden. Yale University Press. $2.50.
THE FORM OF LOSS. By Edgar Bowers. Alan Swallow. $2.00.
A SWIMMER IN THE AIR. By Howard Moss. Scribner's. $3.00.
SELECTED POEMS. By Lawrence Durrell. Grove. $1.25.
WOMEN OF TRACHIS. By Ezra Pound. New Directions. $3.00.

The situation in poetry, on this quarter's evidence, seems much like that in painting. These poets can be negatively defined, as Valéry defined the Symbolists, as not expecting large audiences, as not dealing directly with public ideas or emotions (such as *they* are, these days) and—a descent in this from the Symbolists—as not discovering anything much new in the medium itself. Painters are more fractionally gregarious than poets and keep alive at least the semblance of controversy; but the state of both arts is really the same. The defining limits of abstraction and eccentricity have long ago, for this era at any rate, been reached. What remains, though nobody likes to say so out loud, is an eclectic display of talent, wit, and synthesizing imagination. Intelligence can advance even though language and rhetoric stand still. I enjoyed all these poets and feel wiser for having read them, yet I can't describe them with the hieratic fervor that Messrs. Blackmur and Tate, among several, once brought to their omnibus reviews.

Affability, on the whole, is the order of the day. Moss is good nature personified, though he can be tellingly mordant. Edgar Bowers is an extraordinary eruption of the neo-classic *stille Grösse* and *edle Einfalt*. Pound's bonhomie, in passages of the *Trachiniae,* reaches almost to the gruesome. James Wright's collection of waifs and strays move in a mercifully enveloping nature, their cries muffled in shifting metaphorical vistas. In making up a *Selected Poems,* Lawrence Durrell left out the longer, combatively Audenesque poems, like "Eternal Contemporaries" and "The Anecdotes," from his earlier books and kept some dullish shorter poems that conform better to the Ovidian *persona* he is trying to achieve. What we see is a counter-revolution by diffidence rather than by repression. Both the radical and conservative impulses are thwarted by lack of opposition. Graves, Winters, Rexroth, Williams and Fitts continue to fill the upper air with grape shot. One would like to get hit by some of it, but it always seems just out of reach.

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*Best Poems of 1955,* consisting of one poem per poet a page or two long, is as good a choice, I think, as could be expected from this peculiar method of selection. There are good poems here by Frost, Warren, Horan, Roethke, Heath-Stubbs and others, but it is Wilbur's "A Baroque Fountain in the Villa Sciarra" that crowns the whole. It's a wonderful poem; the times have made it so. However we may object to its aesthetic piety (by the standards, at least, of St. Francis, who appears toward the end to balance the moral equation):

*If that is what men are,*
*Or should be, if those water-saints display*
*The pattern of our* areté
*What of these showered fauns in their bizarre*

*Spangled, and plunging house?*
*They are at rest in fullness of desire*
*For what is given, they do not tire*
*Of the smart of the sun, the pleasant water-douse,*

*And riddled pool below,*
*Reproving our disgust and our ennui*
*With humble insatiety. . . .*

or however we may grumble at one or two inert phrases or the edifying overtness of the whole (all possible objections, I think), we are astonished at the aptness of Wilbur's choice of language, rhythm and meter, at the fullness and energy of it all. The poem itself is at rest in the fullness of desire (the desire to admonish as well as delight), solidly in the reigning climate but perfectly expressing the climate at its most outgoing. Wilbur is by no means always this good.

James Wright and Edgar Bowers both offer first books and rather neatly divide the popular (or perhaps populist) and highbrow traditions between them. Which is to make a distinction that tends to evaporate as attention moves from subject and temperament toward the poetic means chosen. Wright appears—no disparagement intended—as a little father of the provinces, in a fugitive, tragic world inherited from Robinson, Frost, Wordsworth, Burns and Clare. He rates high marks for humanity, sobriety, emotional delicacy and technical conscience. But he is not yet fully visible in his work. We miss Frost's speaking voice. Sometimes he verges on a sentimentality of contrast, treating his rural crises with a shade too much charm and synesthetic mildness. If there is less than ever of a recognizable "country" these days, so much the

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harder is it to be a country poet. How to find a private role, as Frost did, that generates enough action and feeling? The movement of contemporary sensibility is all in the other direction, toward a static contemplation, with pious gestures toward the gods and myths, of the already achieved. But there are many good poems in Wright's book, among which I especially liked "Sappho," "Mutterings over the Crib of a Deaf Child," and the following:

LAMENT FOR MY BROTHER ON A HAYRAKE

*Cool with the touch of autumn, waters break*
*Out of the pump at dawn to clear my eyes;*
*I leave the house, to face the sacrifice*
*Of hay, the drag and death. By day, by moon,*
*I have seen my younger brother wipe his face*
*And heave his arm on steel. He need not pass*
*Under the blade to waste his life and break;*

*The hunching of the body is enough*
*To violate his bones. That bright machine*
*Strips the revolving earth of more than grass;*

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*Powered by the fire of summer, bundles fall*
*Folded to die beside a burlap shroud;*
*And so my broken brother may lie mown*
*Out of the wasted fallows, winds return,*
*Corn-yellow tassels of his hair blown down,*
*The summer bear him sideways in a bale*
*Of darkness to October's mow of cloud.*

The echoes we hear of Hopkins' "Felix Randall" or Lowell's poem on the death of Arthur Winslow do nothing to spoil our pleasure in the poem's grave vitality and originality. The mowing machine comes alive; the struggle between man and machine is fixed with a clear-eyed knowledge and controlled emotion rare at any time.

Edgar Bowers' very small book reveals a gift of the order of Chatterton's. He is not slick, but the kind of precocious perfection of harmony, depth of comment and richness of characterization he has managed in his early twenties provokes the same amazement. This is one of those books that describe themselves, in phrases like "Subdued essential ripened through excess," "Ingenuous patience eager with assent," "Unshadowed being turning like a wheel," "bitter phidian serenity" or "spectacular innocence." Bowers writes like someone who has read Keats intensively under the eye of Yvor Winters, sacrificing everything to a leisurely, sumptuous intellectuality and a remarkably disillusioned brilliance of phrasing. The disillusionment of the '50s is not that of *fin de siècle*; no Dowsonian languors here. Mr. Bowers even seems to be a Christian, if one can assume it from several uses of "He" and "Him." Little originality in his themes, which run to richly turned paradoxes, fluent polarities, short imaginative flights around a deeply felt, elaborately reasoned harmony—Mozart (2 poems), graveyards (2 poems), several elegies, religious meditations, "To Accompany an Italian Guide-Book," and a striking poem on a German prince whose son turned traitor and spy. His rhetorical means are the simplest, being ambling iambic lines set either in strictly rhymed quatrains or blank verse. Still, it *is* remarkable; one had not expected Parnassian verse to be so attractive again. The reason for its excellence, I think, is that Mr. Bowers thoroughly enjoys what he is doing, is wise well beyond his years and has a rare temperamental poise.

Howard Moss is not limited by being a "*New Yorker* poet." He does more than anyone else to redeem that magazine's by now somewhat arthritic image of the happily precarious cosmopolitan, the kindly

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but sentient and trenchant haunter of beach, apartment, museum and theater. One must compare him with Wilbur and the other sociable wits; yet his voice is quite distinct. We may be too suspicious of so much melopoieia, so much "music" (dread word!) in a poet of this seriousness. When since Browning has that not been so (says the shade of "Willy" Yeats)? Moss establishes a poetic vista or scene, elaborates it with a great variety of means, then quietly points to the worm i' the bud. He seeks a subtle euphony and variety of the full-bodied, secular phrase, often of literary ancestry, avoiding what has been aptly called the *mythus ex machina* and the apparatus of inspirational ecstasy. In Stevens' phrase, his verse goes "downward to darkness on extended wings." He can be movingly right in "A Gift to be Simple" (a tribute to Albert Einstein) and memorably sardonic in "Small Elegy." Serious as he is, technique rather than temperament is the major interest. He is not quite a Heine or Laforgue; we hear certain loud silences. Like the storm he describes, his verse is often half coloratura and half caesura, with a center of gravity well apart from the confessional ego. Can he *really* be all compact of loving appreciation, satisfying memories, compassionate insight and forgiving irony, as he appears in this collection? Does he never want to *épater* a bourgeois, commit some high unconsortable breach of comprehensibility like Empson's splendid "Bacchus"? Such unmannerly questions get asked of any poet as successful, as exotically sane, as Mr. Moss.

Lawrence Durrell, as poet and novelist (*The Black Book, Justine*), critic and travel-book writer, seems to have forged ahead of most of the postwar poets with whom he was first anthologized; and by force of exile, long brooding on Mediterranean scenes and Alexandrian themes (influenced, doubtless, by Cavafy, Montale, etc., the Latin erotic poets, and Byron), to have emerged as a figure who begins to challenge Graves. He comes out of the Auden-Oxbridge atmosphere and continually falls back into it even in his best and latest poems. He is softer and gentler than Graves, but equally virile in his duskier, intellectual and feline way. Nothing, however, is very stable so far in Mr. Durrell, not even the virility, which can seem put-on at times. There's an airy, old-shoe, slap-it-up note in his work which may be why the *Times Lit. Sup.* finds that "There is no nonsense in Mr. Durrell." Perhaps not; but there is something suspiciously like it. Here, in toto, is his "Niki":

*Love on a leave of absence came,*
*Unmoored the silence like a barge,*
*Set free to float on lagging webs*
*The swan-black wise unhindered night.*

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*(Black and pathless were the ways*
*Of sleep to which such beauty led.)*

Granting what isn't too clear, that silence and not Love is the barge, and that a swan may be said to float "on" rather than by aid of his "webs," why should the unhindered night "lag" unless it has trouble keeping up with the barge; and by what right does the poet attribute "such beauty" to this odd aquatic procession? Enough. It may be Durrell's relative lack of self-consciousness that lets him be so good when he wants to be. "A Ballad of the Good Lord Nelson" is raw and funny. "Deus Loci," "Alexandria," "Fangbrand," "A Portrait of Theodora," and "On First Looking into Loeb's Horace" are the work of a poet with something intelligent and sometimes moving to say; a poet (how else can you put it?) who has lived and loved.

All these poets have belonged to the rather sticky postwar climate. Pound lives in a climate all his own. I would prefer to defend him to the bitter end as the admirable poet that he is, but the *Trachiniae* translation, in its queasy mixture of rumbustious dialogue and elegant choral versification, seems a failure of judgment more than a failure of powers. Why *should* Pound be a good translator of Sophocles? It's all too easy

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to laugh at the earlier versions and their hymn-tune lyrics, their throaty, parliamentary neo-Elizabethanisms and Tennysonisms. We are more tough-minded and less moralistic about the classics, and can see that Deianeira is not what Mackail calls her in 1909, another Imogen or Desdemona. She has fits of (justifiable) anger and self-pity, she informs the chorus that one can get away with anything in the dark (597-8), and prudently decides (630-2) not to send Herakles her love until she knows whether or not he returns it. Our minds are little prepared for this grand Sophoclean homeliness of motive in so grim, austere and elevated a play. But does Pound really right the balance by making Deianeira talk like a cross between Tallulah Bankhead and Ma Kettle?

Pound drops more than a fourth of this very terse drama. Why? One speech of 37 lines is reduced to 29. Does he perhaps feel that Sophocles is too prolix, or is he just eager to arrive at Herakles's "Splendour, it all coheres" which he calls "the key phrase for which the play exists . . ."? It is good to have the play's intellectual action thus underlined, but what *is* action in poetic drama if not the sum of everything said, thought and felt, moods and tones as well as abstract demonstrations of fate? Pound's Herakles is more bully than wounded bull. And why should *"Eurutou polin"* be "Eurytusville" or *"aiai ā talas"* come out as "Gosh!"? This breeziness was fine in a mixed bag of lyrics like the Confucian Odes; here it is overly apologetic and too self-consciously endearing.

Still, if this isn't quite what Mr. Kenner says it is, "the first readable twentieth-century version of a Greek play," it is certainly an interesting assault on a magnificent and too-little-known work. Pound gives it a driving emotional energy in the dialogue, a beauty and distinction in the choric odes that delights even while throwing the whole thing off balance.

*What mournful case*
*who feared great ills to come,*
*New haste in mating threatening her home,*
*Who 'hark'd to reason in a foreign voice*
*Entangling her in ravage out of choice.*
*Tears green the cheek with bright dews*
*pouring down;*
*Who mourns apart, alone*
*Oncoming swiftness in o'erlowering fate*
*To show what wreck is nested in deceit.*

**R. W. Flint**

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# CORRESPONDENCE

## JAMESIAN MATTER

SIRS:

I don't feel that Irving Howe's review of my *American Henry James* (PR, Spring 1957) deserves a direct reply. He simply didn't allow my text to interfere with what he wanted to say. But your readers ought to be told what sort of hatchet job Howe's was.

A conventional piece of scholarship in which the works of the Henry Jameses are examined and a relation between their meanings and their characteristic images established, is gravely declared to be destructive of literary values and critical discriminations; its author although cunning enough to conceal the fact (except in one sentence!) is "essentially fanatical"; and, in this case, the method of the new criticism has been used to disguise madness. This, of course, gives Howe away at once; not even the most innocent would be likely to see the new criticism in such a book. He must be up to something, and in fact he is.

Before I come to what he is up to, here are a few instances of his handling of my text. He associates remarks made about one novel or group of novels with another novel or group of novels; puts aside my explanation of the relation among the parts of my book, substitutes his own, and then scolds me for not supplying any; tacitly denies anything in the least problematic in Henry James, including those difficulties which his prized "critical discriminations" have established (and which provided a starting-point for my work); scolds me for not measuring James's precise intention in drawing on his father's work, and then denies that he did.

Howe's review provides the evidence as to why he feels threatened. He is busy saving a formula which runs: Society—Political Novel—Artist. It isn't really the asserted connection between the Henry Jameses which troubles him. It is my conclusion that

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both father and son make dramatic situations prior to external conditions, biological, social or what not. His question may be put: if the novelist isn't coping with a Society Out There, what is he doing? He writes of the novels: "What else endows them with their high drama? *What else could?* For without this awareness of the power of all that is external to the self, it may be doubted that James or anyone else could write novels at all." Howe is here looking into the American abyss, but he steps back. (Apparently he wants to define the novel as dependent on naive philosophic realism—a game in which Society tosses its terrible presentment to the novelist who attempts to toss it back again.) But Mr. Howe clearly never stopped for a moment to ask himself *what* I was calling American in Henry James, for whom (as for Emerson, Whitman, Melville) society was *not* imaginatively compelling. Their characteristic attempts at self-definition have the desperate metaphysical finality of Ahab's quest. You need not be happy about the fact—I am not—but if you find that it dictates the structure of James's last three novels you report it. James, like other nineteenth-century American authors, does sound like a Professor of Moral Philosophy; and where has Mr. Howe been for the last fifteen years—wandering about Portland Place investigating the social complement of *The Golden Bowl*? Or explaining to his students how poor Isabel Archer was financially and spiritually fleeced by those wicked expatriates—as if *The Portrait of a Lady* was really about a confidence game?

It is time those students gave him a reading list on the great American quarrel with matter; the attempt to make selves without the aid of Marx, the mediator, or manners.

QUENTIN ANDERSON

*New York City*

SIRS:

Though Mr. Anderson charges that I have mishandled his text, he fails to provide any concrete examples. Had

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he done so, I would have been able to reply to this charge and the interested reader could then judge for himself. As it is, Mr. Anderson's procedure must be regarded as highly dubious: a sort of accusation through non-specification.

Rather than deal with my detailed criticisms, Mr. Anderson has speculated on my motives for attacking his book—as if he could not imagine that I simply thought it a bad book. Every wounded author feels tempted to indulge in such speculations: they form, I suppose, a recurrent motif in the daydreams of literary men. But if psychologically assuaging, they are intellectually fruitless. For even if I held to the absurd notions that Mr. Anderson attributes to me—even if I were dunce enough to suppose that there isn't "anything in the least [!] problematic in Henry James" or that novelists must, by critical decree, always confront "a Society Out There" —that would still not affect the validity of the specific criticisms I made of his book.

I wrote, let it be remembered, not to complain that Mr. Anderson had failed to employ my "formula" for The Novel, but to complain about what his "formula" did to James's novels. My point was that his monolithic passion for confining James's major novels to a Swedenborgian straitjacket not only lacked warrant in the known facts about James's life and work but did catastrophic damage to the complexities of meaning, the patterns of organization and refinements of vision in the novels themselves. Mr. Anderson's book, as it seemed to me, sacrificed the richness of James's work to the rigidly asserted claims of an allegorical system—and a system peculiarly uninteresting in its own right. This criticism Mr. Anderson has not even touched upon; and how little he seems able to grasp, let alone refute, it is shown by his fabulous claim that his book is merely a "conventional piece of scholarship."

Let me assure Mr. Anderson that I too am aware of the impulse toward philosophical idealism and spiritualiz-

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ing metaphysics among certain nineteenth century American writers; I even know—having learned it from several James critics and scholars unarmed with Mr. Anderson's Skeleton Key—that James was partly shaped by this heritage of thought. But I insist that James the novelist, precisely because and insofar as he was a novelist, had to work out for himself a much more complex, worldly, conditioned and dialectically charged view of human conduct than the vaporous ponderosities that Mr. Anderson has tried to impose on him.

I am intrigued by Mr. Anderson's belligerent appeal to my students. (What was it that such things were called in the '30s—a United Front from Below?) But let me quickly waive the proprieties and urge that, reading list in hand, he come and spend an afternoon with those students, talking about Henry James, literature and "the great American quarrel with matter." He should find it a lively experience.

IRVING HOWE

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